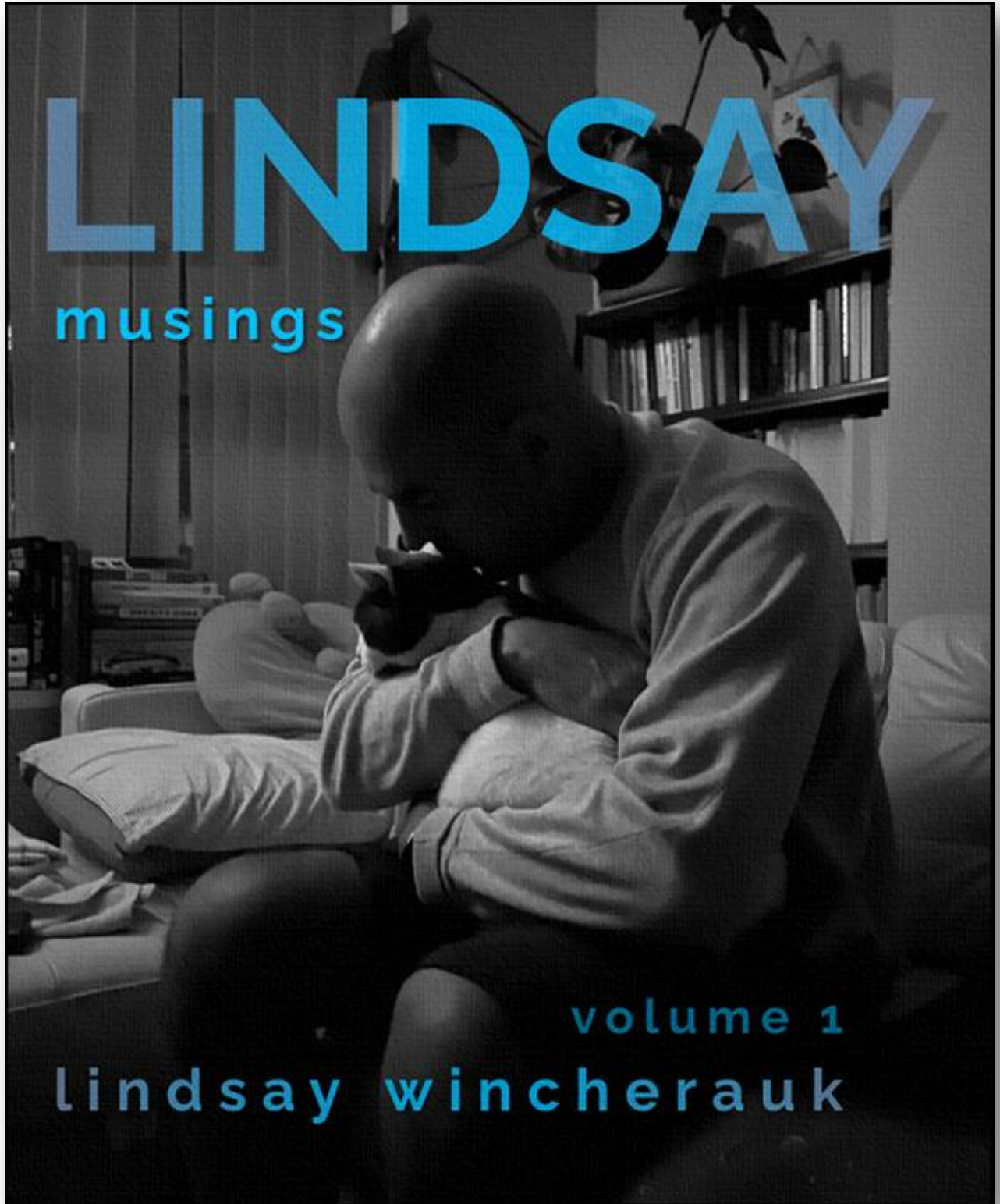


Lindsay Musings: Volume 1



Lindsay Wincherauk

the days in the life of of lindsay

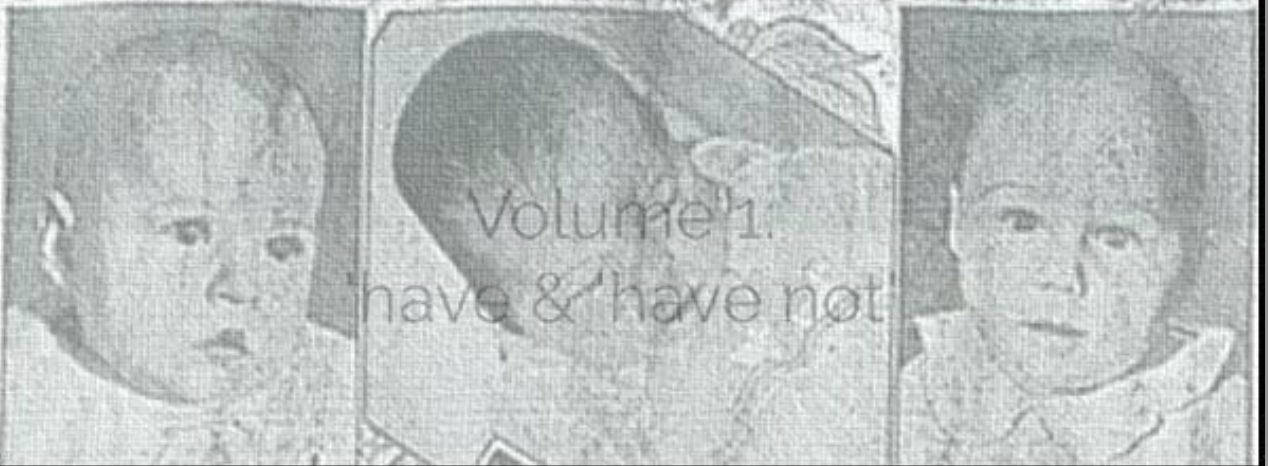
40
mostly
true
stories
about
'have'
&
'have not'

wincherauk

-the travails of-
an unwanted son

lindsay
wincherauk

How About One of These Babies for Your Christmas Gift?



This is the gut-wrenching tale of a man whose identity was stripped away with the swipe of a pandemic's cruel hand. At 60, he watched his life's work crumble on day one of the global lockdown.

Undeterred, this man embodies resilience; he pens fourteen novels, traces over twenty million footsteps, and digests the wisdom of three hundred books. Yet he battles the crushing realization of obsolescence creeping upon him—his age, a silent thief of relevance.

Despite his relentless efforts, he feels his voice fading into a void, unheard and ignored – drowning in a nightmare where he and his family teeter perilously close to a downfall as cold and unforgiving as the asphalt that threatens to claim their fate.

In a world enamoured with curating flawless façades on social media, his pleas for help are lost amid the noise. It echoes back to him as a refrain too often repeated, too easily dismissed. This man, whose pride is as impenetrable as steel, would never stoop to beg. For he knows the true cry for help doesn't echo – it resonates, it penetrates, it demands to be heard. Yet, in the stark reality he faces, that cry seems but a whisper in the relentless storm of indifferent perfection swirling around him.

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Let's start a conversation.

4

The crying heart does not seek an echo; it seeks solace, aid—a hand to hold.

5

I was put on this earth to face challenges, get through them, and never lose sight of compassion, kindness, and understanding.

6

Let's make the world a better place!

Our society resembles an iceberg; stable in appearance above water but disintegrating beneath. This isn't an abrupt catastrophe but a slow erosion. Unless we change the way, we speak and act towards one another, the concept of 'normal life' that we take for granted globally is on the brink of disappearing right before our eyes.

7

Perhaps, the most insidious aspect of privilege – the very curse it carries – is the seductive and erroneous conviction that one’s initial leap forward was ever a warranted testament to personal merit.

8

I Am Genuinely Lucky

(What it is like aging and in need of help)



9

You've surely grasped by now my family, and I have been skirting disaster, perpetually stuck behind the eight ball.

My stress levels? Sky-high.

Denial? My unwelcome shadow.

I've pushed myself to the brink, desperately trying to claw out of a pit I never dug, facing the sobering truth I'm becoming invisible (obsolete) in the cutthroat corporate race.

“Friends” have sometimes offered words to soothe the sting of reality, yet their ‘comfort’ often rings hollow, compounding the hurt. Offhanded remarks slip out, slicing through the air – these words, once unleashed, can’t be reeled back in.

They force me to weigh their intentions: ignorance or malice?

I don’t bare my soul for sympathy or idle chitchat; it’s simply the unvarnished truth, burdened with fear and fragility that grips our every waking moment.

And yet, I count myself fortunate. Strange, right?

Indeed, there are souls in my life, people who pledge their help with an **“All you have to do is ask.”** But when I muster the courage to reach out, their **“Not a good time”** echoes hollowly. Or **“Just ask”** followed with, **“Did I tell you I’m declaring bankruptcy soon?”** hijack my pain.

10

Heed this, for it is cruel beyond measure: to force a tormented spirit to beg is an act of viciousness.

If your intentions are truly benevolent, action should follow silently – compassion in its rawest form, not tainted by the sadistic pleasure derived from amplifying the anguish of the already downtrodden.

In short: act with kindness. Do not cloak cruelty in the guise of aid, nor bathe the wounds of the weary in the sting of disdain.

I must stress these individuals started the conversations.

Fortunate, I said?

There are those who offer empty hopes, and then there are angels.

Take this friend of mine in Australia, Wes. Though separated by miles and years, without a moment's hesitation, he stepped up, preventing my family from descending into homelessness. No strings attached. No demands for justification. His help is pure love, empathy, and the silent understanding that by admitting my struggle, my plight is grave.

11

Acknowledging the truth within myself, this is the crux – for those of us scarred by relentless hardships, we are embroiled in a silent war with our own worth, battling the insidious belief we are undeserving of love and support. We recoil at the thought of being a burden, haunted by echoes of a past that ingrained in us the cruel lesson of our supposed insignificance.

12

Pause and let that sink in.

A life battered by trials is a fortress of doubt, its walls steeped with the perpetual dread of abandonment, every shadow a menace of solitude.

Like automatons, we have been meticulously molded by the pervasive grasp of our *Socials*, ensnared in the ceaseless compulsion to fabricate an idyllic tableau of our lives. Every post, a stroke in the masterpiece of illusion portraying nothing less than a utopian existence – even if the canvas of reality tells a starkly different tale.

The thought of losing everything, the fear of homelessness, it's a monster that breathes whispers of giving up into my ear. But it's the people who truly listen – those remarkable few who believe in action over empty platitudes – they give me strength. They transform the desperate energy into hope, not for the vacuous sound of it, but the tangible presence in my life.

Thanks to them, the possibility of a life erased is kept at bay. Instead, we build resilience, confronting challenges with the defiance of mirth rather than succumbing to surrender. There will always be a tomorrow.

And then there's my saviour – an angel not just in name. Last year he survived a dreadful accident, emerging minus a leg but with an unbroken spirit. Even in his own storm, he recognized the weight of the depth of my pain. This, this is the power of love – not just well-wishes or prayers.

Listen closely, my friends, for when a soul bares its torment to you, it's a silent plea for understanding. If you find yourself powerless to act, acknowledge that. Sometimes, silence is a mercy compared to the cruelty of a dismissive will. When a person bares their soul, it should be an act of simplicity. But pressing a suffering soul to voice their pain – forcing words from their weary heart – is not just a sorry act; it is a visceral assault, a savage obliteration of their essence, a merciless dance with a void that crushes their spirit into the unforgiving chasm of nothingness.

Vanish from the scene if you must but do so with the grace of clarity. Leave them not stranded in a downpour of pity but standing firm in the knowledge of where they are, free from the humiliation of having to plead or justify their agony. Incidentally, they aren't pleading for a thing from you; their existence doesn't orbit around your essence. Instead, they are audaciously stripping away the veneers from their raw, unapologetic honesty.

Understand this: the mere act of revealing a wound should suffice. The crying heart does not seek an echo; it seeks solace, aid – a hand to hold. 15

Compassion doesn't require perfect words, but an earnest readiness to embrace their struggle. To ask a wounded soul to iterate their despair is to turn away from the very essence of compassion; it is to do the bare minimum, and in doing so, you amplify their isolation.

If you find yourself at a loss in the shadow of another's grief, let your silence be your answer – it is an acceptable refuge.

And then, with that peace afforded, you may return to the curated illusions of flawless lives we too often parade online.

It's raw human connection we seek, not distant hopes or prayers. I'm no emblem of resilience, no battlefield hero. I'm painfully human, ensnared in a nightmarish reality, and I'm uncertain if there's escape.

And in the latest twist of fate, haunted by the specter of COVID-19 which plundered my career, fueled by corporate avarice, I find myself considering an alliance with the very architect of my despair.

With hollow promises of redemption for my 'brilliant mind' and 'artful writing,' am I being drawn back into the lair of the beast?

They say insanity is repeating the same mistakes and expecting different results. Where, then, do I stand on the brink of this maddening precipice?

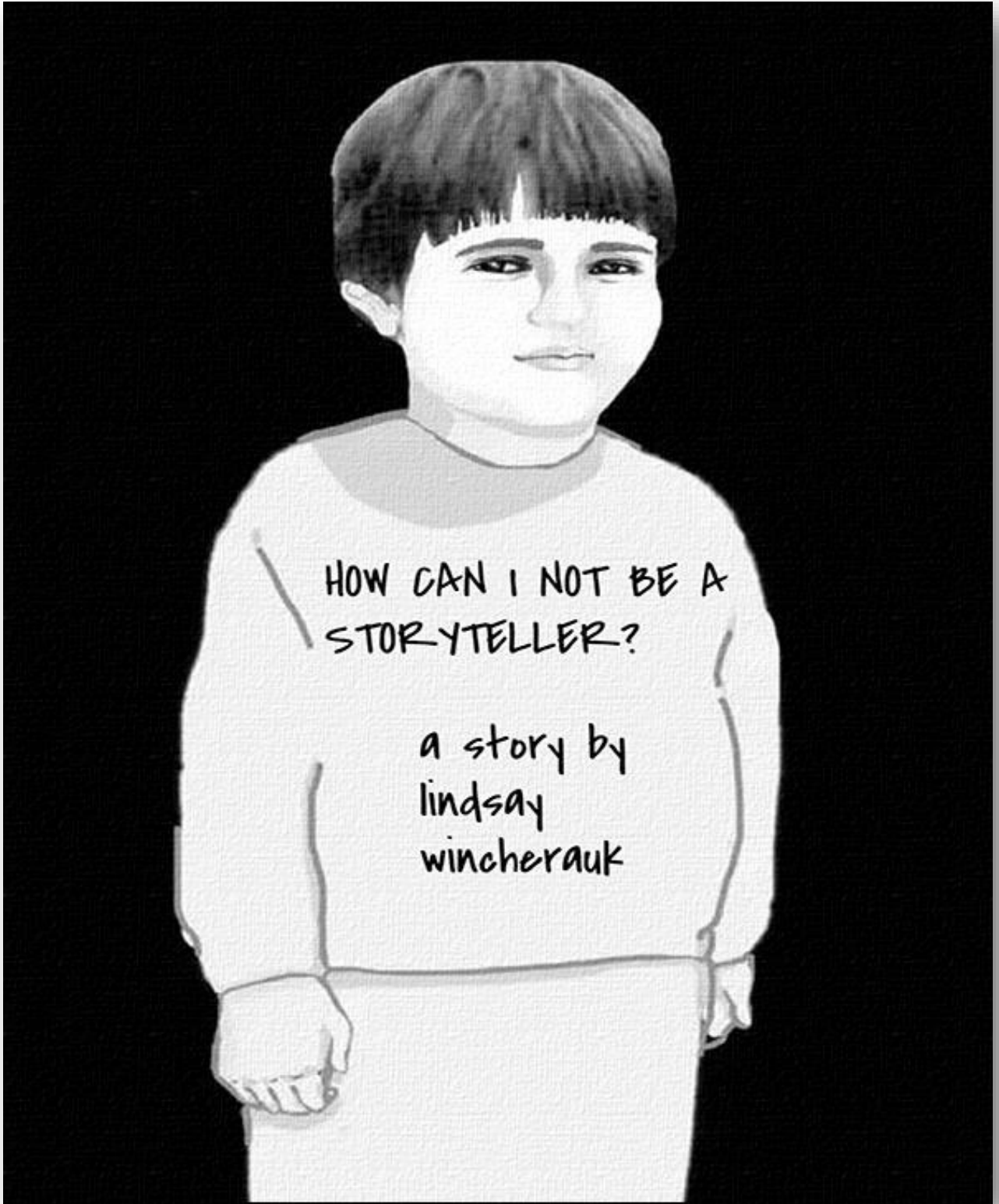
As for my angel, thank you Wes, your love is profound, I'm grateful to have you in my life. A kindred soul.

... ..

I was put on this earth to face challenges, get through them, and never lose sight of compassion, kindness, and understanding. Let's make the world a better place!

17

... ..



HOW CAN I NOT BE A STORYTELLER?



19

The first of every month comes laden not just with bills but a heavy historical weight. It's the day Jay and I, e-transfer our rent to a man whose gaze stretches back through decades of Zimbabwean jurisprudence. Our landlord, once a Justice of the Supreme Court under Mugabe's shadowed reign, now exchanges pleasantries with us at the door with an air of stoic grace, his wife Sue always a whisper behind him. It's surreal, to say the least.

But then again, so is the notion that the Man in Black himself strummed chords in honour of my cousin Alexandra Wiwarchuck. You might not find her story in the annals of internet searches, but in the hushed tones of family gatherings, they say Johnny Cash captured her tragedy in melody after Colin Thatcher, son of the Premier, allegedly spilled her blood along the South Saskatchewan River one summer night in 1962 - a whispered truth I gleaned not from the papers, but from somber bedtime stories.

20

My parents, those guardians of adopted secrets, spun these yarns. It wasn't their genes I carried, but their inherited mosaic of history that coloured my identity. And while Colin Thatcher became known to the world for the murder of his wife JoAnn Wilson in 1984, it was the earlier, unsolved crime that echoed through my lineage.

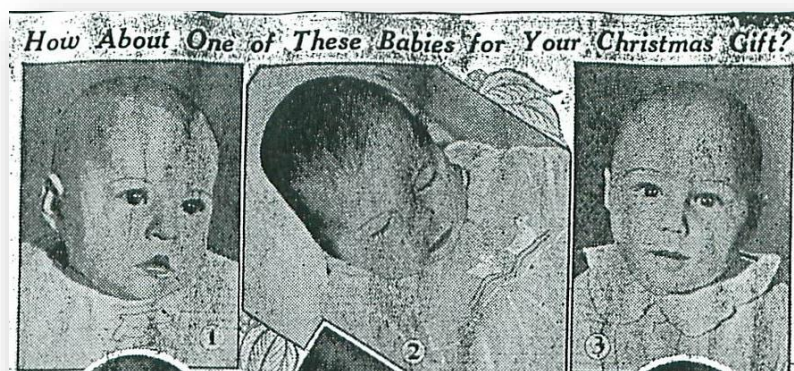
21

The mantra “**Everything Happens for a Reason**” sometimes feels like a cruel joke, but it’s stitched into the fabric of my being. I arrived into this world on July 16, 1960, in the grim corridors of Beulah House in Edmonton, where the sins of loveless unions were buried, and society’s judgment drowned under the hush of religious piety.

Babies, considered the shame of their unwed mothers, were stripped from warm embraces and either tucked away into the farmland’s austere cradles or sold as precious currency to the arms of the affluent.

My birthplace was not a beginning; it was a marketplace for innocence.

Yet, against these odds, **I emerged with an unshakable sense of purpose:** to unearth stories, to give voice to the silenced whispers of history that cling to my soul. This conviction is not a choice; it breathes life into my every being. It insists, with every pulse, that I must believe.



Baby Adoption Offered As Christmas Gift Idea

How about doing part of your Christmas shopping in the basement of the legislative building this year?

Here's the idea, as proposed by C. B. Hill, child placement officer in the department of child welfare. "What could make a grander Christmas present than a darling baby?" Mr. Hill asks, revealing that he now has available for adoption some of the finest babies he has ever seen in his 24 years as official "baby man" for the provincial government.

"... He who gives a child a home builds palaces in Kingdom come," wrote John Masefield, England's poet laureate. But isn't that just part of the story? Isn't adopting a baby sort of a double-barreled Christmas gift, benefitting the otherwise neglected child by giving it a home and also bringing joy and happiness into that home to benefit the foster parents? He who adopts a baby provides a Christmas present both for himself and

placed thousands of deserted and neglected children in Alberta homes. They have been adopted by professional men, members of parliament, farmers, business men, clergymen and others. Many of the children placed are now grown men and women, making successful careers for themselves in various spheres of life.

Mr. Hill now has a fine group of babies for adoption. Information about them can be obtained by applying at his office in the basement of the legislative building or telephoning him at his office, 916-258, or home, 23937.

Mr. Hill emphasizes that babies can be taken on trial before final legal adoption procedure is carried out. The desire is to secure a good home for the children and to have the foster parents completely satisfied.

The child placement department is a unit of the child welfare branch in the department of health in charge of Hon. Dr. W. W. Cross. T. ... is superintendent of

Emerging from a shrouded beginning, my existence was a hushed transaction, destined for a farm family's arms or the void of the never-born. My mother, her lips sealed by faith and shame, relinquished me as penance, her path back to matrimonial purity paved by my disappearance.

24

An afterthought, perhaps, yet here I stand – scathed, but unbowed. My life hinged on a decision, wavering between adoption and oblivion.

Fortune or fate, call it what you will, favoured my first breath – gratitude courses through my veins for that choice. Childbirth was a crucible where too many mothers and infants met their demise.

25

Whispers of these tragedies sometimes echo the grim history of residential schools, don't they?

Abandonment issues?
The question hangs heavy, rhetorical, and suffused with irony.

Indeed, my journey was not one of adoption, nor was I traded for currency. Instead, I became the family's unspeakable secret, shuttled from hand to reluctant hand – a living embodiment of the lie they were all conscripted to maintain.

Was I so homely as to be undesired, or was it something more?

The times be damned. Oblivious to any other reality, I carried on, each day unpeeling a sliver of the truth hidden beneath the veneer of the life I was given.

Navigating through life's intricacies with partial blindness (a literal affliction I bear), I sensed the absence of crucial elements—those vital pieces that complete a person's essence. Vital, indeed, as they hold the key to wholeness.

As the revelation bore down upon us, my relatives scattered to the four winds, unable or unwilling to shoulder the mantle of reality.

27

Abandoned, I was left to grapple with the specters of doubt and the haunting fear of being unloved—vulnerable to a world ever ready to prey upon the fragile and the forsaken.

My family's traditional roles tangled and twisted like a vine out of control: aunts morphed into sisters, uncles adopted the role of brothers, and my father – what form did he take in this ever-shifting kaleidoscope?

28

The youngest of seven, I threaded my way through the days, yearning to be seen, to be acknowledged. My silent plea manifested into a roar for attention: “SEE ME – truly, see me.” 29

I channeled this fervent desire into the dusty grounds of a baseball field, etching my name into the record books as an all-star second baseman, as well as a decorated city and provincial champion. I forged an identity as a record-holding, one-eyed titan—a quarterback whose name would echo in three divergent halls of fame, whose victories spanned city, province, and nation.

30

Embraced by the glory of my twenties, the merciless shadow of loss loomed. The sequence of life's cruel cuts began with my father's departure, the day following my 25th birthday, and less than two years on, my mother's absence sealed the gaping wound.

31

Cancer, that malign force, stealthily stole them away, despite the relentless back-and-forth—the over 1500 times my brother Brian and I traversed the well-oiled path between hospital and home.

The final night before another return to the hospital, as the arctic chill of a minus thirty-five-degree night enveloped us, my mother and I paused on the steps of our abode. I watched as tears born of her realization crystalized upon her cheeks. She lifted her gaze, eyes brimming with despair, and whispered, "I'm never going to come home again, am I?"

I offered comfort in the form of a falsehood. And I despised every syllable, every breath of the lie.

The day my mother exhaled her final breath, the fabric of my world unwound after she pulled me close and faintly whispered in my ear, "goodbye," leaving me alone to weave the fraying quilt of my existence anew.

Her demise was not just the cessation of her heartbeat; it was the crumbling of the foundation upon which I had built my life.

More than three decades have since trickled through life's hourglass, and now, the rare echoes of family come through whispers of illness, the heavy breaths of dying, or the solemn stillness that follows death.

33

These infrequent calls are the only threads that tentatively connect me to a past that feels increasingly distant.

Why don't you bridge the chasm? Extend a hand across the growing divide?
It's not that simple. Our minds are complex mazes, winding, and re-winding upon themselves.

Oftentimes, the pathways leading to reconciliation are overgrown with the weeds of hurt and the brambles of misunderstanding.

34

Our psyche isn't programmed for straightforward navigation through the thorny underbrush of estranged relationships. It's easier said than done to reach across the void, to find and forge a new connection where old ones have frayed and vanished into the ether.

After years of living in a monochrome existence, I uprooted my life and found myself in the vibrant, rain-soaked streets of Vancouver, where skyscrapers grasp at the heavens and the sea whispers to the city's soul.

It was an unlikely home, but one teeming with the promise of new adventures and unforeseen turns of fate. And besides, my friend Wes was living there.

In one such twist, I swayed to the reggae beats and the heat-soaked breeze of Negril, Jamaica, with the grand ambition of purchasing a charming seaside hotel. However, my Caribbean dream skidded to a halt when I crashed a motorcycle on the treacherous mountain roads, my plans dissolving into the sapphire waves below the cliffs.

Amid political chaos, I found myself navigating the tense streets of Panama, a country held in the iron grip of Manuel Noriega's military coup. The air was thick with unrest, and the clamour of the city stood in stark contrast to the sudden silences that fell when gunfire echoed in the distance.

On the days when the world felt more surreal, I stepped onto a basketball court for a pickup game with none other than Fox Mulder – or rather, the actor who brought him to life. We exchanged playful banter and three-pointers under gym lights that seemed to wink at the improbability of it all.

At the break of dawn, I once shared a breakfast table with The Thing, his rocky countenance every bit as imposing as his comic book legend, though his warm eyes told tales of humanity behind the façade.

And in a moment bizarre and utterly mundane, I wove through a bustling shopping mall food court, only to brush past the crimson robes of the Dalai Lama himself. His serene smile lingered in my mind long after the scent of fast food faded. And so, with these tales spilling from my lips, you cast me an incredulous glance, the skepticism clear in your eyes. There's disbelief there, the unspoken challenge that whispers, **"You're making all this up."**

40

In the tumultuous spring of 2003, the universe seemed to conspire against me with a relentless succession of heartache. Over a mere eight-week span, the specter of death weaved its unforgiving narrative through my life, claiming the lives of five people who were the keystones of my existence.

Amidst this cascade of loss, the fragile threads of my romantic relationship unraveled, leaving my heart frayed and exposed.

I had hoped for some solace in routine, mundane tasks – one of which was obtaining a new birth certificate in order to obtain a new passport. Little did I know, this simple errand would be the catalyst for an unraveling of a different kind. The truth was unceremoniously foisted upon me on the most impersonal of phone calls.

A civil servant, with an indifferent timber in her voice, shattered my reality. **“We can’t renew your birth certificate,”** she stated matter-of-factly, **“because the details you’ve provided don’t match our records.”**

42

A pause that felt like an eternity hung between us before her next question jolted me. **“Could you phone your parents and ask them who your real parents are?”**

The foundation of my identity crumbled beneath me – I was suddenly, starkly, not the person I had believed myself to be all these years.

43

The news severed my place in the family valance as the youngest of seven siblings.

When I confronted one who had worn the title of my brother, I did so armed with the shards of partial truths that now composed my existence. His words, however fleeting, upended my sense of self once again. I learned my mother – a woman I'd always thought of as my sister – had borne another daughter, my true sibling, three years subsequent to my own birth. The sands of my lineage had shifted, and I found myself standing as the eldest of what were now only two.

To add to this growing estrangement from my supposed life narrative, there was my girlfriend, Corrie, Wes's sister – my companion of many years. Our connection had always felt deeper than mere happenstance, bound by something inexplicable. She was three years my junior and, like a poignant echo of my own newly unveiled story, was adopted. My heart, already ravaged by loss and betrayal, dared not utter the question silently forming in the back of my mind. She couldn't possibly be... could she?

45

Four arduous months had crawled by when, amidst the gothic allure of Munich, Germany, my friend Wayne's voice crackled through the phone, piercing the veil of mystery surrounding my origin. He unveiled the identities of my birth parents. My mother... argh... a sister who had woven a relentless vitriol of dismal prophecies, foretelling I was destined to be nothing but a failure.

My father - an enigmatic shadow, a blank canvas in my mind's gallery, nothing more than a question mark lingering in my heart.

As autumn's chill descended upon us in November 2006, I found myself navigating the streets of Vancouver, buffeted by the relentless gales of an inescapable windstorm.

Against all odds, it was there, in a restaurant parking lot, during the gale, I met the man believed to be my birth father, a stranger with an uncanny semblance of warmth in his eyes.

He ushered me into the folds of his family, and for a brief, heartwarming moment, I was enfolded in an embrace I'd never known.

In his acceptance, I became a cherished member, expanding the small circle to now be one of four siblings.

47

Merely two weeks had danced by when I picked up the phone, the weight of my words threatening to fracture the fragile connection I had just begun to forge. My voice trembled as I confessed to my newfound father the appalling lie etched onto my birth registration by my mother's hand – he was not, in fact, my biological father.

With one fell swoop, my father died a second time, this time metaphorically. The man who had so willingly accepted me was now just a poignant reminder of what could have been, a specter of paternal love dissolving before my eyes.

Bereft, I retreated into a world where once again, I was the eldest sibling in a duo, not a quartet.

“You’re fabricating this entire tale,” came the skeptical voice, laced with disbelief.

48

“No,” I countered, with the raw truth resounding in the simplicity of my response.

“No, I’m not.”

With dogged perseverance, I continued my journey through life's complex gauntlet. Tirelessly I wandered, a steadfast voyageur tasked with an eternal quest to gather the fragmented shards of my soul, endeavoring to reconstruct the fullness once known to me.

Yet, in this relentless pursuit, my voice dwindled into a profound silence. Echoing the sentiments of those well-intentioned souls who, in their desire to soothe my woes, blindly attributed the cause to the spirit of the age, I've lost track of the countless instances where acquaintances – whom I once naively regarded as friends – offered up hollow platitudes. “So many people hail from similar tribulations...” or “Countless others have experienced the same misfortunes...”

49

Empty words hopefully leading me to muting them in my life.

When I finally mustered the courage to unveil the newfound truths that composed my reality, one individual – now excised from the circle I call friends – had the audacity to say, “It all makes sense now. We always sensed something was wrong with you.”

The sting of such an assertion lingers; how I wish it were but a figment of my imagination.

There are those who assure me, **“You're better off without them.”**

But the thought of solitude claws at my being – I am not ready to embrace loneliness. “Let someone in,” an inner whisper beckons. Yet the question remains, an enigma wrapped in my yearning: How?

50

And still, I press on. In the vastness of life’s mosaic, piece by precious piece, I uncover more of what I had lost, or more aptly, never had. For this, amidst the bittersweet complexities of my odyssey, I remain ever grateful.

Among the patchwork of extraordinary souls that grace my life, I carry a compelling charge to continuously weave the fabric of my story into the broader quilting of human experience.

51

It was in the spring twilight of 2009 when tragedy struck amidst the haven of a local gay bar—a place that should have been a sanctuary from the prejudices shadowing us outside.

A dear friend of mine, 62 and deeply cherished, suffered a brutally unprovoked attack. A man, fuelled by nothing but hate and ignorance, swung his fist with such force it shattered not only the sanctity of that space but also the delicate equilibrium within my friend's skull. The aftermath was catastrophic – a vicious blow resulting in irreparable brain trauma. I remember the hushed murmurs and the distinct scent of fear mingling with spilt drinks as I chased the assailant down the neon-slicked streets, my heart pounding against my ribcage in disbelieving sync with my footsteps.

Upon confronting him, the cruelty of his words echoed the violence of his actions, chilling me to the core. **"He's a faggot. He deserved it,"** he declared, his tone laced with disturbing conviction. That statement has since been etched into my memory, a stark reminder of the darkness that resides in some hearts.

52

My friend spiraled into a shadow of his former self, never to reclaim the vivacious spirit that once animated him, and two years on, he succumbed to the invisible wounds that had relentlessly gnawed away at his vitality.

The perpetrator?

His punishment was laughably fleeting – a mere six years designated for a hate crime, yet he sauntered free after only two, an affront to justice and to my friend's memory.

When my friend's fate sealed with tragedy, an outcry for change roared to life. 'Enough is Enough,' the rally summoned, calling on voices to rise above the violence that had claimed yet another life.

It was before this congregation – a sea of 5,000 souls united in the quest for peace – I found myself sharing a piece of my heart, voicing the hurt, the anger, the loss. My knees trembled, my voice wavered, but the weight of my friend's silenced laughter pushed me forward.

In the aftermath, whispers reached me – voices I recognized, but not ones I'd call friends. They muttered their dissatisfaction, claiming I hadn't spun the narrative to highlight their roles, that my words should have danced more around their contributions. But this was not about them. It was, and always will be, about my friend, about the stark truth we face, and about the love we must foster to drown out the hate that took so much from us.

As the phone call drew to an end, on an early October evening, I wondered at the strange twist of fate. The cousin on the line, someone who had once been known to me as a niece, relayed the harsh news: my mother – who had once been a sister to me – rested on the precipice of death.

Journeying to Calgary that melancholy October in 2016, the crisp autumn air felt heavy with memories. It had been nearly three decades since I'd last seen her, our paths diverging in the shadow of our matriarch's passing. I'll never forget how the chill of that day matched the one that had haunted us back when we lost our mother. Her mother.

As I entered her palliative care room, a sense of déjà vu enveloped me. There I was, standing beside the woman who had given me life yet felt like a stranger, a woman who only now, as her own life ebbed away, took on the role of my mother.

For a fleeting ninety minutes, I endeavored to weave the threads of a bond that had never had a chance to form.

Our conversation revealed more than any previous engagement had allowed – a raw, unfiltered patchwork of emotions. Bitterness gripped her words, anger laced her breath, and resentful thoughts filled the space between us. Her revelation echoed with pain, “My father wasn’t a good man,” she confided, a shadow passing over her weary face. And when I asked her who my father was, she vehemently said, “At least it wasn’t that asshole,” the name she had placed on my Birth Record.

55

When the time arrived for parting words, I reached out and folded her into an embrace that was only our second – the other dating back to the dark night we lost the first mother figure in our lives. Then, our parting had been abrupt; her eyes, once wet with grief, instantly regained composure as she ushered me away from what was formerly my sanctuary, now needed for other mourners coming into Saskatoon.

In that dim room in Calgary, I wrapped her frail form in my arms, imparting every ounce of love and strength I could muster. Her voice quavered, a frail whisper heavy with irreversible goodbye, “I’m never going to see you again, am I?”

Upon returning to the familiar yet indifferent embrace of Vancouver, I confided this intense reunion to a friend. His response was as blunt as a sledgehammer, “A lot of people come from fucked up families.”

His words, meant to be a solace, were instead a dismissal, aye, a softer blow would have been to command my silence.

Those were the times.

Fuck off.

Merely a week later, the news came – my mother had departed this world a second time. Abandonment clung to me like a second skin.

Fuck off.

The loneliness gnawed at my core, an unwelcome companion whispering doubts about the right to burden another with such heavy chains of pain. It felt monumentally unfair – too-fucking-much to ask of anyone.

The question hung in the air, barbed and accusatory: “Are you okay?”

How could I be?

A drift amidst this tumultuous sea of emotion, I endured by sheer will.

Pushing forward, piecing together a semblance of normalcy, I wrapped myself in the warm cloak of storytelling.

Twice, I took to the stage, mic in hand, humour as my shield – I performed stand-up, baring my soul through laughter amidst the echoes of my heartache.

I secured a tenure with an enigmatic corporation shadowed by the grim reputation of exploiting the anguish of those teetering on the margins of society.

For nearly a decade and a half, I was the epitome of dedication, infusing a mix of respect and empathy into the fabric of the company culture, as I rose through the ranks, becoming a beacon of guidance to our diverse workforce.

My resolve did not waver, even as I navigated the treacherous waters of survival following a debilitating stroke that came without warning, stealing my fluent speech and full mobility in a relentless tide.

Amidst this personal battle, the tendrils of illness and mortality crept closer, their dark whispers carrying news of family falling prey to sickness and the shadow of death inching ever nearer.

60

Then, as the world grappled with the foreboding onset of a global pandemic, I was unceremoniously stripped of my position. Discarded without the slightest remorse or a backward glance – as disposable as the bathwater splashed from a tub, this decision was ostensibly a consequence of my advancing years, as I was on the precipice of turning 60.

From the genesis of that societal upheaval, I became another forgotten relic, condemned to gather dust on the shelf of the disregarded – permanently sidelined, with no reprieve in sight.

The corporation – my once trusted employer – displayed an appalling indifference to the profound depths of depression and the economic decimation their abrupt dismissal wreaked upon my life.

After a tenure marked by unwavering loyalty, I had now joined the growing ranks of the aging workers deemed expendable in the harsh eyes of industry.

With dignity as my shield, I made a stand for myself – craving the respect, seeking the validation that was swiftly and callously ripped from my grasp. But there would be no more pleading, no further entreaties. Silence settled like dust. Acknowledgment, understanding, compassion – it all fell away.

After navigating the twists and turns of life for nearly sixty-two years, I've come to a profound realization: my riches of experiences, woven with strands of triumph and adversity, holds a wealth of wisdom I am compelled to contribute to the world.

Yet, the very company that once fuelled my daily purpose vehemently disagreed with this newfound clarity of mine. They not only hindered my progress, but they also had the audacity to send an emissary – one cloaked in the false civility of corporate guise – to execute a metaphorical assassination upon my character. This so-called representative coldly dismissed me as a 'failed writer,' asserting someone as inconsequential as I had no place in the pursuit of such fanciful 'dreams.'

Can you believe that?

This spokesperson had the further gall to arrogantly suggest I should simply fall in line and obey, as if my years of dedication were nothing more than a footnote in their grand operating manual.

I've crossed the milestone of six decades and three years on this earth. It's been three years since I've been expelled from the company's ranks, unceremoniously discarded like a piece of obsolete machinery that had outlived its operational efficiency. Not one of them – no colleague, no manager, not even a peer from the old days – has bothered to pick up the phone, to check in, to extend the barest hint of human concern for my well-being.

63

I gave them almost fifteen years of unwavering service, my attendance record unblemished, my loyalty steadfast; and yet, their actions, or rather the lack of them, paint a vivid picture of their corporate ethos.

The sun rises and sets in a predictable embrace, and with each golden dawn, my ritual remains steadfast. I've confessed this, a solemn mantra I find myself repeating I rise with the hesitant light, allow my thoughts to gather like a storm of locusts, and then I unleash them upon the page.

In the labyrinth of my mind, there are over one hundred and twenty-three tales, each simmering like a pot of alchemist's brew, waiting for their chance to transform leaden thoughts into narrative gold.

Sixteen manuscripts – my literary offspring – are scattered across the desks of indifferent gatekeepers, their fates hanging in the precarious balance of acceptance or rejection.

Yet, even in the face of oblivion, my resolve is ironclad; surrender is a word that has been expunged from my vocabulary.

Amidst this tempest of creation and anticipation, a whimsical detail emerges according to the whims of genetics and the revelations of a DNA test, I carry within me a lineage of Viking blood. Forty-eight percent of me hails from the icy fjords and towering cliffs of Norway, a heritage shared by a vast tapestry of humanity.

65

Yet, the world's indifference to my newfound ancestry is palpable, a stark reminder of our shared smallness beneath the vast cosmos. "Fuck off," the universe seems to whisper with each beat of its cosmic heart.

In the looming shadow of possible revelations, I find myself teetering on the edge of another familial precipice. There's a chance that in uncovering the secrets of my paternity for the third time—each more uncertain than the last—I might shed the title that has defined my place in the family hierarchy for so long. I stand to lose the singular distinction of being the eldest among the two souls that sprang from the same mysterious wellspring.

The adage speaks volumes: you cannot truly comprehend another's essence until you've traversed not just a solitary mile in their well-worn shoes, but countless, through their journey.

67

Yet, what becomes of those whose paths have been strewn with relentless adversity, each step a herculean task burdened with the weight of sorrow?

How can one forge connections when encased in an armor of persistent distress, and when the ache of heartbreak becomes a monotonous echo in the chambers of their existence, dismissed as mundanity?

68

Yet herein lies the crucible of significance – The heartache – undeniably profound. The need to vocalize – imperative. I am compelled to speak. To weave my narrative from the threads of an exhaustive, seemingly ceaseless sequence of hardships. An unyielding catalogue of woes so vast, it necessitates segmentation, dissection into bearable parcels of my past.

Such a relentless chronicle, this litany of life's trials, that I choose to commence my recollections from a more recent chapter – starting in the year 2016.

And so, I begin. This divulgence does not seek the shallow comfort of pity. No, I unravel these threads of my history in pursuit of comprehension, to extend a hand holding an olive branch, signaling peace, questing for solidarity.

70

Acknowledge the steel in my resolve. Embrace the depths of my empathy. Feel the breadth of my compassion. I am here, with a tapestry of tales unfurled, ready to share.

From March 2016 to January 2020, the specter of death and misfortune loomed over me, casting long shadows.

On a somber March day in 2016, the world dimmed with the loss of Allison, my youngest niece, anchoring a series of goodbyes.

By summer's pinnacle, June claimed Bernard Hrapchak, a thread plucked from the fabric of my childhood memories.

71

Come October, an eternal farewell awaited as I stood by my mother, Bernice - her identity as my mother cementing only in her last breaths. A brief autumn week later, she slipped away.

Winter brought no reprieve, as it swept my sister Beverly into the inescapable cold.

As the year closed, I wrestled with a sinister diagnosis - Sarcoidosis, a rebellious flame ignited by my workplace environment.

72

With the new year, my body betrayed me. A stroke in January struck like a thief, stealing pieces of the world I knew.

Love and loss intertwined on Valentine's Day as Jeff V departed.

L2019 unfurled, and with it, Gordon, my uncle, joined the silent ranks.

73

A revelation came as cruel as it was terminal - an Alpha One Deficiency clawed at my lungs.

Defying odds, I continued, even as an unwanted transfer to the Surrey Office loomed ominous, a harbinger hinted at by my own condition.

Jason D, a friendship sculpted over shared living, became another memory as the year darkened.

74

Yet, as the decade waned, a sliver of hope pierced my litany of despair - my Alpha One diagnosis, a dark cloud, had been mistaken.

In the relentless march of time, 2020 unfurled its trials. A career termination, shortly thereafter a milestone at sixty, followed by a throat surgery that proved both saviour and sword, as erstwhile employers sought to turn my lifeline against me.

History echoed its grief on the day Scotty Larin's laughter was forever silenced - an eerie symphony to the silence that my mother's passing had left years ago.

The legal battles and health scares interwove, encapsulating my sixty-first year in paradoxical celebration and somber commemoration - life continued amidst death as the calendar mourned with me over Sadie and Rebekah.

Hheart episodes punctuated the closing days of 2021, a stark reminder of mortality as I forged an alliance with a cardiologist, underwent scans, and confronted the trials of a thrumming heart.

Spring 2022 whispered the finality of loss with Dannell P's departure.

Tests and trials paced my relationship with time, challenging me at every beat until→↓

September delivered the opportunity of retribution through a counteroffer - a calculated strike, 911 days in the making.

By my sixty-second summer, the turning of the year's wheel had etched resilience into the fabric of my being, a testament to survival inked into each line of my story.

The revelations I have unfolded before you are not only extreme; they are steeped in the unvarnished truth.

How could I possibly weave lies into the very fabric of my destiny?
I am acutely aware my purpose on this tumultuous earth is to weave narratives. And so, on the days when tears aren't streaming down my face or tremors aren't seizing my hands, I drape my sorrows in the gossamer of wit.

78

Note About Our Landlord

A It was a crisp November day in 2021 when he and his wife, Sue, graced the threshold of our abode. I, in my casual disarray, mustered the semblance of decorum to welcome them – attired in nothing but my well-worn boxer shorts and the slightest hint of formality afforded by a faded t-shirt.

Before me stood a man who had once presided over legal destinies as The Justice of the Supreme Court of Zimbabwe. And there I was, a humble host in my minimalist attire, extending courtesies to a former pillar of jurisprudence.

Quite seriously.

Who else but a born storyteller could find themselves in such a peculiar page of life's grand book?

But then, I pose this question to you not in search of an answer.

Rhetorical, indeed.

... ..

Thinking of the Children (Sure) – A Scholastic Ruse Brought to us by the NIMBY people.



80

In the undercurrents of contemporary society, the dark truth lies veiled: schools, once bastions of learning, have been hijacked by the wealthy. Disguised under the noble cause of nurturing young minds, they have become pawns in a chess game to bolster property values.

We, my family, and I, stand on the other side of this shadow line – cast as villains in a tale spun by the privileged, who drape their greed in the cloak of children’s welfare. Misguided fears are cultivated in the young, painting those amongst us who fall through society’s cracks as monsters to be feared, all while masking the real horror – a callous sacrifice of human life at the altar of real estate profits.

In the gilded heart of modern society, the haloed sanctuaries of learning - schools - are meticulously sculpted into silent shields by the affluent, their veneer of child welfare disguising a fierce crusade for property price fortification. Within this cunning masquerade, my family's benevolent spirit, an innocent bird in the snare, risibly looms like a specter in the fevered imaginations of those who bow to the almighty dollar. Such fearmongers skillfully daub us as the malevolent phantoms of urban legend, an image as far from reality as the moon from the earth, while we, innocent yet accused, teeter on the crumbled edges where society's glitter fades to neglect.

Contemporary society often manipulates educational institutions to bolster property values in affluent neighbourhoods, disguising this exploitation under the guise of children's welfare. Despite my family's benign intentions, we are vulnerable to vilification by those who prioritize their real estate investments over human dignity, a threat that looms larger as we persistently slip through the fissures of society's framework.

82

One of the pressing issues in modern society is the pervasive use of schools as tools by the affluent to safeguard their property values, all while purportedly focusing on children's welfare.

My family and I are good people, children have no need to fear us, but if one were to listen to those desperately protecting their property values at the cost of human life, children would be taught we are devils to fear.

... ..

House Cleaning



83

Our world is crumbling beneath us, and we are each other's unwitting saboteurs. On the brink of destitution, my family and I teeter. Daily, tears stain my cheeks. My relentless job search weaves into the rhythm of my life – job applications each morning, the scratching of pen on paper each night. But who reads in today's world, a place where the written word is a relic, on par with background noise at a sports bar?

My fear becomes tangible – I am a vestige of a bygone era, wrestling with obsolescence, defiantly proclaiming my relevance. Every dawn, I make my pilgrimage to the Fitness Asylum, but the journey is marred by an unsettling scene.

Before me stretches a canvas of human desolation – a congregation of discarded souls camped outside the glass façade of a ubiquitous coffee franchise, a scene straight out of a dystopian Dr. Seuss.

This heartrending visage serves as a bitter reminder of society's blind eye. Comfortably numb passersby wrestle with discomfort; their judgments are swift, their solutions simplistic – assimilate, conform, strive.

How bitterly ironic it is to demand such from those consigned to the edges of our world, where survival is a herculean task. Amongst the sanctimonious voices of ignorance, I teeter on the brink – an unwelcome epiphany of who I must shed from my life's orbit.

Each morning, they loom – a mere decisions away – even as I stride toward the temple of self-improvement, vowing not to join the ranks of those condemned to the curb. I am not destined for the cold concrete, not meant to find solace in the harsh warmth of foil-wrapped relief.

The world insists, **“You are not like them. You are a warrior. You are tenacity personified.”**

Such platitudes ignite my inner turmoil. With each morning’s light, a perverse ritual unfolds as workers, their own fates hanging by a thread, scour the sidewalk with high-pressure hoses. The cleansing waters chase the pain into gutters, yet the anguish, like oil, refuses to wash away.

It is a young man, nearly as destitute himself, who is consigned to erase the remnants of suffering for crumbs.

A homeless man breaches the café's threshold, his very essence fragmented by afflictions unseen – his rage, a torrent unleashed on an indifferent world. I empathize with the overwrought staff while spurning the corporate leviathan that devours the dreams of its franchisees, erasing the 'undesirables' just beyond its gleaming windows.

We are indeed failing each other – with alarming frequency.

The true indictment lies not with those ensnared in hardship, but with the unyielding titan of corporate voracity, the overseer of our mass trampling.

As news anchors report sobering rental averages – an impenetrable \$3,000 for a mere room – my refuge becomes the impersonal embrace of a fast-food joint. Here, even as I am handed autonomy over a cup of soda, I am under the watchful gaze of wage slaves ready to sever that fragile liberty, guarding sugary streams as if they were liquid gold.

A friend commiserates with the grinding toil of café proprietors. Yet, I challenge the notion, their plight a byproduct of false promises and predatory commerce.

I reserve my empathy for the wretched souls huddled on street corners, condemned to the relentless scrub of the affluent and oblivious, a casualty amidst the unyielding churn of greed.

... ..

The Lady

1



The first of December emerged as a serendipitous surprise, cloaked in a soft, pearlescent sky, its chill air crisp with the scent of impending winter – yet mercifully dry.

I navigate the contours of Lagoon Drive with a deliberate mindfulness – as if imbuing my stride with profound contemplation could somehow elevate me beyond the mundane.

As fate would whisk me forward, **I confront the pedestrian crossroads:** Lagoon Drive veering right, Barclay Street branching left, and straight ahead the beckoning trail to English Bay.

Amid this urban tableau, our narrative threads entwine with a lady – age concealed in the enigma of time. Permit me a dalliance with cliché as **I describe our encounter with her:** a figure both ubiquitous and elusive, the archetypal ‘everywoman’ etched into the canvas of city life. Her steps mark a prelude, cresting the pavement’s divide a whisper before mine.

She casts her lot with Barclay, veering right, and in a mirror of her choice, my feet chart a parallel course upon the same artery of asphalt.

Navigating the sidewalk’s ballet, she deftly glides to its edge, yielding space in a silent choreography. As the city’s pulse beats around us at the stroke of three, she traverses the subtle gulf between us with words, unspooling the brief yarn that binds our solitary sojourn. **“I’ll let you pass,”** she declares, severing our ephemeral camaraderie as though shedding a layer of time-worn fabric. Yet, her narrative weaves onward, revealing threads of vulnerability. **“I feel a touch more secure in your wake,”** she confesses, investing the humdrum moment with an unforeseen intimacy – her reasoning a canvas stretched and ready for strokes of understanding.

So, you know what I did?

... ..

2



December 1st brought a pleasant, crisp, and dry day despite the overcast skies. I'm deliberately walking up Lagoon Drive, believing that **"mindfully"** sounds smarter than **"mindlessly."** At a literal fork in the sidewalk, Lagoon Drive veers right, Barclay Street branches left, and straight ahead lies a path to English Bay.

I encounter a woman – whom I assume is in her fifties – writing about her seems like a moment of mediocre description. She reaches the fork about twenty steps ahead of me and turns right onto Barclay. I follow suit, also turning right (my left) and start walking up Barclay.

The woman steps aside on the sidewalk, making room for me to pass. It's 3 PM and the street is busy. She announces, **"I'm going to let you pass,"** as if it's the end of our fleeting connection. Yet she adds, **"I feel better walking behind you."**

That comment is slightly odd but it's where we'll pause.

"I feel safer behind you" she says.

So, you know what I did?

... ..

3

December 1st has unfolded into an unexpectedly serene day. The air is crisp, the sky a tapestry of overcast hues, free from the grip of rain – a rare gift.

I tread along Lagoon Drive with deliberate intention, choosing mindfulness – not out of genuine reflection, but as an artifice to cloak my thoughts with an illusion of depth.

At the inevitable fork where the sidewalk splits, the choice is mine: right to continue on Lagoon, left onto Barclay Street, or straight ahead, a route that promises the tranquil embrace of English Bay.



As fate choreographs our paths, I encounter a woman whose age appears to dance around the brink of fifty. Her presence commands little attention, drab to the passersby's eye. She reaches the junction a mere twenty paces ahead, veering right onto Barclay.

With an echo of her steps, my own decision is sealed – right for her, left for me, as I follow her tread up Barclay Street. Hugging the edge of the sidewalk, she sidesteps with a strange formality, yielding space for me to overtake her. It's 3 PM, yet Barclay thrums with the pulse of city life.

Her voice slices through the hustle, crisp and clear, **"I'm going to let you pass,"** a mundane parting of ways. But no, her narrative stretches on – **"I feel better walking behind you."** A pause languishes in the air, loaded, before she punctuates the sentiment, **"I feel safer with you in front."** In that utterance, our fleeting convergence deepens, a thread of connection woven in a fleeting, pedestrian ballet.

So, you know what I did?

... ..

Randy the →→→ S T R E T C H E R.



On the precipice of despair, my existence teeters. Time's sand slips away on this insignificant speck in the cosmos. My heart frantically hammers against my ribcage, threatening rebellion with each pulse. Yet in defiance – or defeat – I've abandoned what could sustain me. The very medications that tether my racing heart to life go unclaimed at the pharmacy; I can't justify the expense when eating has become a privilege I can no longer afford.

My presence has become burdensome, a parasitic weight upon my family, and a festering wound within myself. Spare me your condescension; your accusations of melodrama do nothing to alleviate the suffocating reality of my plight. Your laughter at my pain is salt in a festering wound – though why you find humour in my suffering remains a mystery that eludes my broken spirit.

Dystopian truth: sustenance is now beyond reach. J's body has surrendered over 30 pounds, withering into a ghost of its former self. I stave off the debilitating clutches of depression with exercise—a futile attempt at normalcy—yet I'm cognizant that one day, when even the gym is beyond my reach, the decay will resume, leaving me eroded, swept away like detritus by the indifferent stream of society. "You need to get a job," they say, as if I haven't trodden that war-torn path. Should my 15-years in HR not bear witness to my dedication? Or do they only serve to highlight my redundancy, coupled with a faltering heart that assures my roof an exit sign?

The polished mask of social media veils the reality of our shared human condition. Yet, I persist—my story clawing for the light, refusing the cloak of invisibility thrust upon it by society’s hollow norms.

But know this: My essence clings to relevancy with tenacious frailty. These are not the white flags of surrender; they are flares in the obsidian void, seeking acknowledgment.

Perhaps you’ve heard the dismissive echo of “Get a job.”

My inbox sings a dirge of rejections, the latest being a polite refusal from a copy center.

I am 63, with years of experience to my name, yet to them, expendable – unworthy even of menial labor.

Some premature ending has been written for me, it seems – a live-stream of my final act as my hand is forced by the capricious whims of those who lay claim to my motivation, my determination, my worth.

The incessant advice of the ignorant rends through my self-esteem.

Aging becomes not a badge of survival but a mark of obsolescence.

I grapple with the knowledge that my intellect, my talent, dance upon the precipice of futility.

... ..

Act 1

I find myself back here, the scene of social exchange I can scarcely afford. Guilt infiltrates my conscience, telling me my dwindling resources would be better spent on meager sustenance than on these few moments of escape from my isolation.

Beside The Mayor, I find a momentary reprieve, even as a strange man's antics in the adjacent stool, stretching and bellowing like some primal call to the wild, cut through our attempts at banal chatter.

We knit humour into our discourse on society's ills, finding levity in the absurdity of hardship. J's substantial weight loss becomes a focal point, revealing the alarming reality that physical transformation sometimes breeds an unsettling yearning for further change, even when the scales already tip in favour of the wind.

Randy (The Stretcher), the peculiar man with a penchant for Ozempic and unsolicited environmental melodies, disturbs our reflection on society's vices, on its susceptibility to quick fixes over substance.

The Stretcher – a man whose swollen knuckles tell stories of battles long past – hurls his fists skyward as though seeking to challenge the gods themselves. He barrels into our fragile exchange, attempting to tear it apart as I unravel my deepest concerns.

My voice wavers, reaching The Mayor: "History loops back upon us," I murmur, the chilling threat of the opiate crisis casting its long shadow over my thoughts. "Even now, as its echoes linger, doctors weave their siren songs, their pockets deepening as they hawk their panacea for the soul. A cure not for pain, but for the mundane – a potion for ego, a salve for vanity."

The movies, meanwhile, continue their grotesque pantomime, exploiting human frailty with a voracious appetite. As I ponder the sequels, I cannot help but imagine how eagerly they will scout for the next unwitting victims. Bodies bearing the burden of their struggles, they'll be paraded as fodder for the masses' insatiable thirst for transformation.

My family stands desperate at crossroads, with our collective breaths held in quiet anticipation for our own miracle – one that I fear may never come.

The irony of my own mortality weighs heavily on me; if fate does not intervene, I will wither away into obscurity: skeletal, unnoticed – a man remembered only for what he never became. Each shuddering breath is a reminder, a cruel countdown to the inevitable: I will die a skinny man.

Randy barges into our dialogue with a chilling revelation, his voice laced with a weary cynicism. His doctor, he confides, has prescribed him Ozempic. The image that conjures up is one of a serpent, a malevolent dealer lurking in the shadows by the schoolyard, proffering the first taste without charge – a tempting whisper with a venomous bite. It's an enticing snare, a promise of a warped love affair with the emaciated reflection staring back from the mirror's deceitful glass. All it would take, he implies with a hollow laugh, is to step onto a treacherous path paved with gold – an addiction to a thinner self, where each subsequent dose would cost a small fortune – a ransom in thousands.

The discussion spirals, leaving us in the disquieting wake of a secular sermon on desire and self-image.

... ..

Act 2

Why am I here again, encased in this ceaseless cycle of calamity?
It's as though I'm the protagonist in a play where tragedy is the only act.
Here I sit, beside Lindsay – not just any Lindsay, but Lindsay with the sharp wit and auburn hair that shimmers in the interplay of shadow and light around us.

Meanwhile, Randy sprawls out in his procedural languor, seemingly oblivious to the world.

Gradually, Randy stirs, propping himself on an elbow, his bleary eyes searching the room until they settle on me. His voice cuts through the quiet. "What'd you do differently today?"

I do not know Randy, and there's a taut string of reticence drawn tight at the thought of unravelling the minute details of my day to him.

Despite myself, I share a fragment, "I walked 40,000 steps, crossed the threshold of a million for the month."

That seems to spark something in Randy. He launches into a passionate oration about the state of our world. "What are we going to do to save the Earth?" he implores with a gaze that tries to pierce the very core of me.

I reply with the weight of a resigned sigh, “I don’t know. Most souls are treading water on this tumultuous orb, grappling with their own battles. The problem isn’t just with politicians but with everyone, this insatiable need to rally us all under one banner, as though life were so simple. We’re not pieces on a chessboard. There are no teams.”

And I add with a hollow echo of frustration, “Most are overwhelmed, caught in the immediacy of their relentless lives.”



So, we're fucked," he extrapolates with the subtlety of a sledgehammer. "No," I counter calmly, "I didn't say that. I merely pointed out that scaling the walls of one's personal fortress to gaze at the world beyond is a daunting challenge for most."

"Your indifference screams DO NOTHING!"

Exasperation seeps into my bones. "I'm just...tired."

"YOU ARE THE PROBLEM," he declares with the arrogance of those who see the world in stark black and white.

At that moment, the weight of every accusation seems too cumbersome to bear, and a singular thought crystallizes—I want nothing more than to retreat to the sanctuary of home. Randy's petulance paints him as nothing less than odious in my eyes.

Lindsay offers a thread of solace, her words soft and tinged with empathy, "I'm sorry you're being treated like this."

I muster a strained smile, muttering, "It's alright. This is a chance for me to hone my thoughts, learn a bit of patience, to truly listen."

Yet within me, truth churns; I'm cloaking my feelings in lies like bandages on a wound that refuses to heal. And in all reality, I want to tell the Stretcher to go fuck himself.

... ..

Act 3

Friday beckons, that recurring siren call for our ritualistic symposium of souls. Yet here I am, a glutton for despair, welded to this seat of torment. Once, these Fridays unfurled as a sanctuary from life's relentless tempests. I wove a cozy fiction to shield myself from truths too bitter to swallow. They used to be the balm; now, they've soured into an elixir of vitriol, an unwitting self-flagellation.

Around this weekly circle, we tread on emotional landmines. I've become the canvas on which grievances are splattered with reckless abandon. Each barb, a poisoned dart, flung with relentless aim - they pierce me, etching a fresco of pain.

Despite knowing the onslaught awaits, I return, an echo of my own confusion. Their words brand me - a mark of failure seared upon my spirit.

Christmas looms, yet I remain anchored – do not presume to chart my course. Such directives are a slight, erasing J from the equation as though J never was.

Last year's Christmas wasn't my heist.

For decades, my doors welcomed the world, but now, as I lay fallen, I am buried deeper in indifference.

The grey shroud of melancholy is my unwanted mantle. No longer shall I be the arena for verbal gladiators.

Life's richness is an elusive prize. My calls to the government, to the United Way, echo into the void - I am the forgotten man.

My tireless hunt for work - 274 rejections strong - seems yet another report I owe to my shadow jury.

100

J's hand grazes my stomach, a comment on flesh surrendered.
Laughter flares, a cruel flame licking my already scorched self-esteem.
I voice an observation, assigning us the roles of light and dark based on my attire and a joiner at the table's attire. His retort, a jibe - "I didn't buy mine at Costco" - sparks hollow glee among the crowd.
I calmly state, "The joke falls flat."
Yet this only fans the flames of annoyance, summoning forth a sermon I wish to unhear.

Why do I recoil?

For half a year I've retreated into silence, each Friday I share less of myself, my journey, my truth. I cower from the counterfeit counsel that veils the jabs and jibes to come.

My heart aches, fear grips me with icy fingers. The road ahead for my family and me is shrouded in mist.

Spare me your commands.

Don't proffer jobs at London Drugs unless you're the gatekeeper to employment.

At 63, with a heart dancing on a thin wire, I can't even afford the rhythm to sustain it.

Rather than dispensing paths I should tread, perhaps a simple "How are you?" would suffice.

Must I remind you of my excruciating odyssey?

A career uprooted just shy of a milestone, the piercing wounds from losing nine cherished ones – six from my own clan – a life-saving surgery (on me).

Each sunset, each farewell, propels me further from ever finding my way home. And fear – that constant shadow – grows.

Tears escape, tracing sorrow onto these keys.

What now?

Do not presume to offer solutions. Instead, perhaps, dare to offer understanding. And should this narrative disquiet you, take solace in the impermanence of my words.

In this darkness, no echo returns.

... ..

**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



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 "**Russian 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."

INTERVIEWER
TITIKATIMETK

Can you expand on that point?

ME
TATE



My 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

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
TALKATIVE

The numbers are staggering.

ME
TALKATIVE

“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 ⁽¹⁾ 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
REFLECTIVE



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 12th 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
T I L E K A I E M E K

That must have been devastating.

ME
T A T E

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.

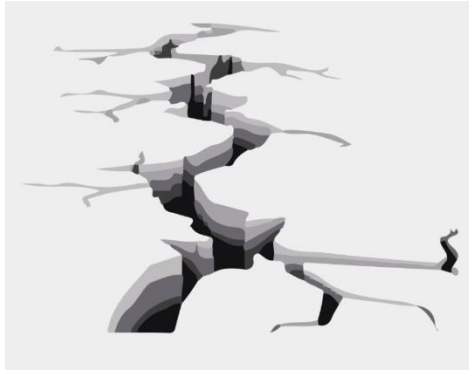
Life had a way of presenting its riddles and whirlwinds, especially as the supposed youngest of seven siblings. Everything was a puzzle I was handed but couldn’t solve.

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.



Beneath 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
REFLECTIVE

INTERVIEWER
INTERVIEWER

You seem to say fuck a lot.

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ME
ME

Fuck. I think it is an honest emotion.

INTERVIEWER
TITIKATITIK

You 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 facade 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 KIFE

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 17th of July 1985, the haunting prelude to my bleak 25th birthday. Unyielding, cruel fate didn't pause there; it led me to the grim watch once more on the 12th of December 1987 – the day I watched the light fade from my mother's eyes (See ⁽¹⁾ ↑↑↑).

Home no longer existed. It never really did; I just wasn't privy to my reality.

INTERVIEWER TALFKAITEMEK

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

Not 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.

INTERVIEWER
TATE

Where 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
TATEKATEMEK

How 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.



Beginning 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
2023 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
2024

In 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

Are 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 LIEE

Who 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
TATEKATEMEK

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 labor, 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 specter 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
TALFKATMEK

Are 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 LIEE

INTERVIEWER
TATEKATEMEK

Is that what this book is about, your upbringing?

ME
TATE

It's a complex tapestry, a 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
~~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.

From 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 specters 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

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! 🙏

... ..

Live (Death)-Stream



I just received an email saying:

Hello Lindsay,

Thank you for expressing interest in Ricoh USA and applying to the 23-03650 - Copy Centre Clerk position. While you have an impressive background, we have decided to move forward with other candidates who more closely fit our current business needs at this time. Therefore, you will not be considered further for this particular opportunity.

... ..

To those of you who judge me, well, you can . . .

I'm 63, and I don't even qualify to work a photocopier.

On December 25th, I will be live-streaming my death.

Part of it is because some people close to me judge me all the time; I'm supposed to be getting off my "lazy ass" and applying myself.

Aging and becoming obsolete is troubling.

I'm talented.

Some would say intelligent, but I'm not sure that matters yet; some people tell me ... I will leave the words blank.

I'll just say it is upsetting, and those who say it don't really know me.

Would you like to see a picture of something I ate?

Part 1



136

Hello Friends,
My words aren't just for me—they're for you. They hold the naked truth, however raw and unflinching it might be because I thirst for authentic dialogue. Dialogue that can stir us, inch by inch, towards a world less cruel than the one we woke up in today.

As I write this, my family is entangled in a crisis, teetering on the precipice of despair. The harsh sting of unemployment in my sixties is a reality I face, merciless and unforgiving. It's a bitter pill no one should be forced to swallow, a pill that claws at my insides every single day.

Yet, in this dark hour, an unexpected grace – an angel from the Australian shores – reached out with a kindness that keeps a roof overhead for December. Still, as each day bleeds into the next, the grim horizon of January looms, threatening to cast us out, our belongings bundled in our arms.

To those who truly know me, know this: My laughter rings louder than any cry of anguish. Amidst the sorrows that have trailed my life, humour has become my shield, my cloak of invisibility against the brutal blows.

Is it denial?

A coping mechanism?

Perhaps a dark cocktail of both.

But there's no time to ponder – the clock is ticking, and I must muster the strength to fend for those whom I hold dear.

Do you know the weight of failing those you love; despite the sweat and blood you pour into the fight?

It's a gut-wrenching feeling that haunts my every step,
nipping at my heels with relentless jaws.

Loss has a domino effect, and when it starts, it doesn't stop. If the unforgiving streets claim us as their own, I beg of you, look upon us not with pity or scorn, but with understanding and an open heart.

Revealing the blemishes of existence is a struggle, yet
I do it because it is truth – our truth.

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Fortunate or not, whatever my fate may be, I summon the courage to push through the turbulence. Yet as I place each card on the table, one by one, I can't help but wonder if the deck was stacked against me from the start.

Thanks for reading.

Warm Regards

• • • • •

Conclusion



Hello Friends,

I owe you an apology. In a lapse of judgment born from exasperation, I declared I would live-stream my demise on Christmas Day. Attempting to defuse the situation, I switched topics, presenting an image of something we ate when we could still afford to eat. I guess I'm the only one who found the irony funny.

I regret if this caused you distress.

Those familiar with me understand that I am not prone to suicide, nor would I consider ending my life.

However, we're in a suffocating bind, as the boundaries of our world seem to draw tighter and collapse simultaneously. The intention behind my live-stream announcement was allegorical, meant to capture the severity of homelessness that individuals in my age group face—a plight that is both metaphorically and literally akin to an end of life for some.

Coming back to my character, I've always strived to be a beacon of hope. Yet, despite rigorous daily exercise, tirelessly sending over 275 job applications, and facing degrading comments, I persist. I write every day, I've implored the government for aid with disappointing outcomes, and have even had two "friends" tell me I have nothing to worry about, going as far as telling me the amount they were willing to help with, imploring me all I had to do was ask.

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When I asked, the responses ranged from "**now's not the right time**" to admissions of their own impending bankruptcy.

I've resolved to not be a burden, despite accusations of my stubbornness.

But the reality is grim, and I refuse to downplay it, regardless of the accusations that I focus on the negative. Even when I'm told I dwell or focus on the wrong things.

Here's what's looming, in what will be my final update on the matter:

1. Our credit will disintegrate.
2. We'll lose access to communication.
3. Upon this loss, J's employment is at stake – this is not an exaggeration.
4. The next steps are daunting...
5. We will lose our home. If that happens, there likely is no bouncing back, my resiliency ends. We currently have the lowest rent in Vancouver. At my age, homelessness means never having a home ever again. That is reality.
6. Our cat will die.

141

My apologies if this is difficult to confront. For those inclined to judge or spout vocational advice, save your breath unless you have a direct job offer.

I loathe emojis.

Platitudes about my resilience are cold comfort.

I'm sorry for the bitter tone of this message.

I've grown to despise the darkness. None deserve this hardship. My previous employer recently admitted their actions towards me were inordinately cruel. I concur.

My aim has been to raise awareness about the rising rates of homelessness among older populations, but such stories don't seem to resonate with the media.

Despite it all, I will persevere, sure. I'd rather not dwell on our struggles—I know everyone has their own.

But let me reassure you that while I am enveloped in depression and fear, I am not suicidal.

I'm genuinely sorry if my post caused you tumult, but reality is reality and like the 90s movie filmed in Seattle, sometimes it bites.

Would you like to see another picture of something I ate?

No.

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I'll leave you with two short poems, both entitled
"Homelessness."



Homelessness

Shun

144



Homelessness

The End of A World.

The end.



I refuse to apologize for feeling pain.

I must break away, repeatedly hit my head against a wall, and dispatch job applications numbered 276 to 280. I've been sedentary for too long, lounging on my lazy ass – yes, that's a defence mechanism reeking of sarcasm.

For those of you keeping score and passing judgment from the comfort of your homes, let me clarify no one seems keen on hiring someone on the brink of turning 64, particularly not someone who relies on six medications just to stay alive.

I loathe the sting of judgment – the incessant scrutiny from eyes that claim insight into my soul. Even more so, I despise the thinly-veiled condemnations dressed up as tough love, insidious and cruel. Each misguided piece of advice, parading as wise counsel, serves only to twist the knife deeper, amplifying the agony until it becomes unbearable.

145

I do enjoy flexing my writing acumen.

This will probably be my last post on our situation – I can hear the collective “whew” – it's time for Social Media to return to Nirvana!

Total Number of Seattle References = 2

• • • • •

The Meeting



You've likely deduced by now; I'm compelled to spin yarns however soul-shattering they may be – each one painstakingly woven from the tapestry of my own trials and travails. I bore witness to my mother's demise not once, but twice.

This story is about a meeting I had with my former employer, for a previous story's sake his name has been changed to Fernando – wait, are you waiting?

Oh, have I arrested your attention?

I'm sitting perched on my spartan office chair, the padding an acerbic reminder of discomfort.

Why bother with such minutiae?

Perhaps, you don't truly need it. In the morrow, or perhaps the day after, I aim to brush the topic of mental health and addiction, the twin spirits hovering over narratives of strife. Would that a sturdier will could simply dissipate homelessness and suffering – a thesis that smacks of simplicity.

I muster a chuckle.

If only it were that straightforward.

Perhaps the master plan is designed to sow discord, to give those teetering on the brink of despair others to peer down upon.

Yes, a simple thesis indeed. Yet, it is entwined with my essence, though I claim no affiliation with the highbrow Mensa.

My intellect?

A theoretical $\infty + 1$, or a tangible 237.

High they say, but I am grounded. I've just staggered in from the deluge of an atmospheric river. My skills in swimming? Nonexistent.

But on the day, I scribe my thoughts on mental health and addiction, don't expect frivolity. That's unlikely. As my kin and I embark on the relentless waterslide to penury, our collective mental well-being, once stalwart as an epic, now flounders after an endless descent down this infinite chute, careening toward uncontrollable chaos.

A momentary interjection to leapfrog my own train of thought – A friend, his name a mosaic of G's, once boasted that at the tender age of twelve, he was already dabbling in insurance due to a neighbor's misfortune with floods.

To that, I feigned accord, sans a trace of irony – save for the blatant.

This G-man relayed his tale as though it were a rite of passage for every young lad, slipping it into our exchange with the expectation of it being received as a riveting anecdote. It wasn't.

Moments later, he confided in his adolescent prohibition from a motor scooter – it seemed he'd scrimped on the appropriate insurance.

Does that anecdote have a place here? Perhaps not, but it clamoured for a release from my thoughts.

The sting of poverty gnaws at me. “A writer? Abandon such folly,” they say. Yet, I’m undeterred and unperturbed as I partake in a Gummy. G-man judged silently, his scorn now a frozen memory. His abode holds no Christmas warmth for me. His mockery? A covert whisper of my name, an insolent sneer shared as if I were the butt of an unrevealed joke.

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Amidst my tribulations, such disdain is unwelcome. I carry no policy for heartache but possess an undying resolve to excise the malignancy of mistreatment.

Delay any further, and my essays on mental health and addiction might be supplanted by rants about how cities morph into voracious corporations, vying for the same transient dollars. Their feigned empathy for the downtrodden is a facade; their true devotion lies with brewery districts and conventions. To them, the destitute are mere inconveniences, absent of political salvation.

Yet, who truly heeds these reflections?

The over/under on the globe's expiry ticks at 22 years—I cynically wager on a mere decade. Should my heart endure, I might reach the venerable age of 73. But what awaits in those final years might best be left undiscovered; after all, my mental health is evidently in flight.

Rest may elude me tonight; it's been bartered for an elusive cause.
And what was this trade, you ask, on this December 4th—a date the pundits dub... ah, it took thrice to spell 'pundits' correctly, and twice for 'date.'

Yes, $\infty + 1$ indeed.

What truly marks December 4th as special?

A brief sojourn on Google yields nothing but persist I must. When I keyed in "**National Cookie Day**," lo and behold...

150

What is it?

An immaculate conjecture — it is, in fact, National Cookie Day! Why the heck did I type in National Cookie Day? Can you hear the ominous music? Get out of the house.

We've crossed into $\infty + 2$ now!

I must adjourn briefly.

While you await, perhaps savour a cookie, but abstain from self-indulgence, unless prostrate health beckons your attention, and if so, and you happen to be of the male persuasion, then carry on discreetly.

Do women possess prostates, you muse?

A preposterous question, I'd venture – no, they do not.

Yet, a venture into Google informs – alas, they bear Skene's glands. But, as the patriarchy would have it, it's sometimes dubbed the 'female prostate,' presumably to buoy their own insecurities.

Another breather is in order.
I shall return anon.
Is it anon yet?

Who are you?

Benny.

Hi Benny.

I don't know, I need to look it up.

Is it part of one of the Skene's glands?

Anon = Soon.

I didn't know that.

I did, I typed it, much like National Cookie Day, I don't know why but I used it correctly.

Let me pull you into a whirlwind glimpse of the future – skip ahead six pages or so, and you’ll catch the heart of the story, where the fateful encounter with Fernando unfolds. But hold on: for reasons none other than I want to, I’ve dubbed him ‘#1’. Don’t be confused; it was purely my whimsy, not some official name change. And his comrades, previously known as The Other Guy and Sam? They’re now ‘#2’ and ‘#3’. Bear with me – it will all make sense eventually.

And a quick note on #1: amidst the story to be shared, he faced a harrowing heart episode, a development that, against my better judgment, elicited my sympathy.

His struggle was real, and, unexpectedly, it mattered to me.

Now, I entrust this tangled narrative to the clarity of AI, to untwist and refine, just as this sentence yearns for its own transformation.

Have I ever confided in you about that whimsical leap through time to the days lingering after my rendezvous with Fernando?

I've taken this audacious step, for reasons steeped in the illicit and the fanciful alike. Imagine the heart-wrenching moment when #1 succumbed to a cardiac scare—a frightening dance with fate. It pierced my usually stern veneer, and in a moment as fragile as morning dew, I found compassion.

Did I hear you inquire about a televised heart episode? Ah, Benny, your jest tumbles through the absurd and into the tender embrace of folly. A stroke did indeed brush my life with shadow, and its chill lingers like mist on weary bones. Now, I scribe 'dus' instead of 'does'—a quirk, a foible, a misspelling, now etched into the lexicon of my being, symbolizing the distorted echo of a malady's whisper.

And so, you may indeed call me sentimental—a sap, if you must—for the unexpected kinship found in the shared language of mortality, that binds me to #1.

A stroke for me, a heart's betrayal for him—our lives dangled over the edge by the same merciless hand.

But now, Benny, the blades of our wit need not duel. Remember the macabre fates I once crafted for Fernando in tales as dark as a raven's wing? The ink has dried on those chapters – the reaper's grip loosened.

With newfound empathy, I pen their survival, as #1's softening touch has tempered my narrative once steeped in vengeance.

Ah, but I digress—one tale at a time. Await the revelation in Part One, our prologue to a tale woven with threads of meaning deep and truths too profound to be anything but the offspring of a bordering genius. In it, #1 dispatches a missive, a text seeking sanctuary in flattery. (I was looking for the text but got distracted – GA just texted me to say he'd pick up my medications for me – his treat) Awe.

The Text

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“With your mind's brilliance, seasoned wisdom, and a quill that dances with fire...”

Okay the text said, 'brain, experience and writing talent,' I took some creative liberties. Damn three times to spell 'liberty' correctly. Use your words. No. No stroke. Whew!

I'll continue.

His words – a sorcerer's incantation – seek to mend the fault lines he carved through my existence.

G-Man chortled at my choice of words – placating, he questioned?

But ah, he knew not of such subtleties. In spite of his ignorance, I acknowledge #1's begrudging tribute with less fury in my heart. The tempest within calms to a zephyr's breath.

Shall we then, to the rhythm of life's unpredictable cadence? What shall be our anthem?

"Benny and the Jets," you propose?

Alas, that tune commands not the feet but the soul's poignant smile.

And what of your expertise, Benny? Surely, you jest about what moves the spirits to dance.

Then, as if conjured from the whims of a feverish dream—a fowl spectacle. A chicken, strutting with purpose across the canvas of our tale, flanked by Kafka in step with the syncopated absurdity, Charlie Kaufman, the puppeteer of the meta and the mind, and Right Said Fred, proudly too sexy for their feathers—collectively, they engage in the riotous flap of The Chicken Dance!

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What wondrous madness this dance becomes—an interlude pulling us through the looking glass into a corridor of satire and synchrony.

The narrative whispers of an affinity for consorting with the illustrious phantoms of prose. To claim a brotherhood with the ethereal Kafka would be a boast too bold for my humble pen. Pray, dispense with such patronizing airs.

Might the notion of a midnight tenure at the local 7-Eleven stir your senses?

What are you talking about it is 4:50 PM?

Upon the closing of this prologue, a peculiar thrill courses through my veins – a harbinger of what, in all possibility, stands to be the most magnificent saga ever woven, sans the 'y' to harness pure veracity.

I had added a 'y' to ever.

“Who might you be?”

Possibly the most sublime, yet obscured scribe of our age, or if the world decreed, the GOAT – undoubtedly,

Benny?

Yes.

Does this recount carry the mirth we seek?

Who uses the f-ing word mirth?

I just did.

My answer to your query is unlikely.

Your prose whispers of a penchant for mingling with illustrious shadows. Hardly so – I dare not boast a camaraderie with the spectral Kafka. Ah, spare me the condescension.

Benny?

Yes.

Is any of this humorous?

Probably not. Why don't you attach a picture of your face?

Benny you're mean, a mean bully. You need to placate me.

I don't have the proper protection.

You are speaking nonsensically.

You spelled that correctly.

I'm not having a stroke.

Are you going to keep this in the story.

Indubitably!

||

I'll be back anon.

Welcome back.

“Thanks, Benny,” my request barely a whisper, shadows of vulnerability in my eyes.

“Could you... would you mind leaving? I need Sparkly here with me.”

Where was I?

This dance of prose and narrative over the last several pages – a frantic, yet meticulously crafted distraction – needs to halt. For once, let’s strive for raw coherence. Correctly spelled on the first try, an honest attempt at transparency.

Navigating life’s merciless gauntlet requires more than just flippancy. It’s time to shed the guise and reveal the unvarnished truth of my existence. For months, my soul’s been screaming for intervention, yet either I possess no true companions or my cries, in their desperate, sexy baritone, simply blend into the cacophony of life unnoticed.

Astonishingly, I persist with this plea, despite recognizing its probable futility. Here we are, the year is 2023, and as I once confided to the Stretcher, everyone is far too entrenched in their own turmoil to spare concern for another – especially someone who doesn't feature in their immediate narrative – or someone deemed unworthy of their time. Except, of course, for Wes in Australia – my kindred spirit amidst the indifference.

I'm not just down, I am plummeting into the abyss of despair, consumed by fear and... I fear for my very life, whether you like hearing it or not. I don't want your ear.
"No, stop it," I chide myself, my internal conflict palpable.

"You're focusing on all the wrong things."

"Stuff it, P-Man."

Resentment bubbles up as I address my critic, pretending to be a friend.

"I matter. My life is significant. Your acrid words are laced with spite, devoid of empathy. How do you muster such coldness and still pretend to offer aid? Your feeble attempts at counsel, far from helpful, are just plain cruel."

160

Don't squander another precious breath on those who refuse to stand and cheer for your journey.

"Thanks, Sparkly," I murmur with grave earnestness, his sagacity a lifeline in the chaos.
"I'll take your words to heart."

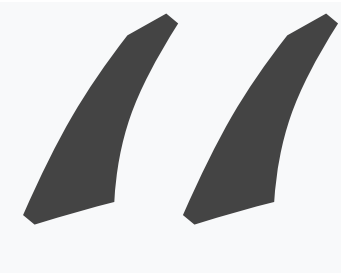
As I attempt once more to navigate the labyrinth before me...

1 finally reached out after three long years, a period in which they laid waste to my family's financial future, offering a hollow olive branch: "I'll give you a reference, as long as it isn't excessive."

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“ #1, your offer comes three years too late. At my age, references have ceased to carry weight. You do understand that thirty-somethings aren't eager to add a sixty-three-year-old to their ranks, don't you?”

162



You're still focusing on all the wrong things."

"I thought I told you to shove off, P-Man." My voice trembles with a cocktail of pain and fury. "Your words are injurious, not supportive." "I don't see your feet in my shoes."



Just write the reference yourself, and I'll sign it."

"I did. It's been in your inbox."

Then, there's silence—a whole month of agonizing nothingness.

Text: I take it you've given some thought to the reference?

Reply: Apologies, I wasn't ignoring you. Pressing issues demanded my attention.

Text: Can we meet tomorrow?

Reply: I'll assist you however possible.

Text: We're teetering on the edge of homelessness. Can we meet tomorrow?

Reply: I'm tied up until next Wednesday.

Crap, next Wednesday is next month.
Next Wednesday arrives...

Text: Hello?

Replies: None. Just silence for another excruciating three weeks.

Text: I guess you're too preoccupied to lend a hand.

Reply: Not a word.

A week later, the phone disrupts the stillness.
“I wasn’t ignoring you... My heart – it gave out. Hospitalized for a week. I’m dying.”

“I... I’m so sorry to hear that.”

“I can’t be of help to you.”

“Are you going to make it?”

“I don’t know.”

“Take care, and... I’m sorry for what you’re going through. Goodbye.”

The phone rings again two minutes later; this time, I detect a quiver in #1’s voice.

“I’m sorry. I wish I could do more. I’ll send you some cash.”

“Any assistance would be a blessing. Thank you.”

The phone buzzes once more shortly after.

“I can’t send the money today; I’ll send the money tomorrow.”

“Honestly, anything will help.”

“I regret what we did to you. Can you make it to my place? I’ll write you a cheque... and I owe you a hug. I’m sorry. The Uber is on its way.”

Before I succumb to this latest rollercoaster, let’s step back together  ↓

• • • • •

To 2008.

Work is a lifeline until my words can sustain me. That blistering Friday afternoon, a cheque lies on the dispatcher's desk: **BREWERS DISTRIBUTION BRANCH.**

Addressed to the **Picture Butte Hotel** – a place lodged in a town a world away – a town seemingly diminishing to a mere memory, yet irrevocably tethered to my origin story.

An unexpected coincidence – or fate's cruel hand – why this cheque, why here?

#1, the owner of my livelihood, happens also to own that distant refuge in Picture Butte.

He's never lived beyond the comforting embrace of North Vancouver, and yet... A shiver courses through me. Out of every town, every possible place on the map, it had to be Picture Butte, where denial and invisibility cradle my root—where my mother, stubborn in her willful ignorance, and my shadow of a father, conceived what would become their greatest oversight.

167

This tale, wrapped in my voice, needs to be told – to patch the scattered, lost fragments.

Edit after edit, yet still, it's not enough. The hospital room looms ahead, a distant vision in the shadow of decades. My mother, estranged yet a blood-bound siren, calls from her bed of finality. It's been a lifetime, yet the words remain trapped within I must return to her side, to bridge the eternal silence.

I must say "hello."

I will say –

• • • • •

In the shadowed embrace of North Vancouver, a story began to unfold—a tale woven through the miles and etched into the very fabric of the place. One thousand miles stretched like a silver thread, a lifeline connecting the heart of Picture Butte to the pulsating core of Vancouver. A journey inscribed with hope, lined with the whispers of the past, and fueled by the promise of redemption.

And at the heart of it all, a simple but profound promissory note — etched with the solemn words, **“Pay to the Order”** — a commitment that bound the fates of strangers, setting in motion a saga both intricate and vast, a symphony of lives destined to intersect.

Is my life about to be discovered?

.....

I HAVE WORKED AS

July 16, 1960–March 31, 2020 (45 Years)

... ..

Of course, I didn't start working at birth.

However, if you knew my family history – perhaps I did.

... ..

Dishwasher + Gardiner + Waiter + Bartender + Hotel Manager + Coach + Bartender
+ Sales Representative + Shipper/Receiver + Hair Model + Bartender + Insurance
Agent + DJ + Bartender + Landscaper + Opinion Editor (24 Hours Vancouver)
+ Telephone Solicitor + Construction Worker + Bar Manager + Core Sample Tester
+ Hair Product Huckster + Bouncer + Almost Nude Model + Movie + Television X-
tra + Night Security + Human Resources Guru + Event Planer + Editor +
Humourist/Comic + Author.

... ..

What was that? Are you suffering from PTSD?

I think it was more like a flashback to a different, simpler time. A time of boundless joy, where you could always see the sun, day, and night. The kind of place where, if you phoned your Beverly Hills shrink—you know, the ‘Doctor Everything-Will-Be-Alright’—you’d feel reassured.

Are you channeling Prince?

Am I?

Don’t answer a question with a question.

Do you love my voice?

So, is that a ‘yes’ to the PTSD?

I think that acronym needs a few more letters. I put this in the story so that when certain people—the ones I’ve begun to despise—if they ever read this, they’ll understand how vile it was for them to lecture a peer within their demographic about ‘getting off their lazy ass and getting a job’ and all that rubbish, echoing the sentiments of both a liver transplant recipient and a retired postal worker resting on their pensions.

You sound angry.

No, I’m just deciding to purge toxicity.

Do you really hope they read this?

Yes, I do hope so. Maybe then, though I doubt it, they’ll climb down from their patronizing high horse and start acting like decent human beings.

Probably not.

Probably not.

I’ll fish out some extra letters from the alphabet soup to describe what you’re suffering from.

That’s a good idea.

CANYOUPLEASCONTINUETHESTORYNOWPTSDDWELLFOCUS?

What?

Can we continue the story now?

I THINK I SHOULD DROP A LINE TO THE CBC
(CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION)

Hello CBC,

In a moment of desperation, I announced on social media my intent to live-stream my death on Christmas Day. This drastic statement stemmed from the loss of my lengthy career on the first day of the COVID-19 pandemic, an event fuelled by corporate greed that plunged me into financial ruin.

Despite my best efforts, applying to over 270 jobs that ranged from the exceptionally menial to those that matched my experience, the grim truth surfaced: the job market is unkind to 63-year-olds.

172

This harsh reality is a testament to the struggles that come with aging and losing one's livelihood later in life. I am aware that my story is not unique; thousands are in similar predicaments, dangling on the precipice of losing it all. Once they do, they die – no longer a burden for the city to contend with.

Please forgive my bitterness and jaded tone.

I recently submitted job application number 276, clinging to hope simply because I am still alive.

Attempts to share my timely tale with the media often hit a wall; it seems not to conform to the prevailing media narrative.

I watch a city councillor on the news decrying a property tax increase and blaming the rising cost of labour and collective bargaining.

Is there something I'm missing?

Labour represents people, and shouldn't we support their efforts to survive rather than admonish them?

Let me not forget to mention that I suffered a stroke at work back in 2018.
Yes, I suffered a stroke.

As the pandemic continued, my family and I watched our life savings disappear and found ourselves accruing what I call 'survival debt.' A news story comes on telling me I'm screwed, and there is no hope because . . .

Now, on the cusp of being rendered homeless and communications cut off come December 25, we are facing the stark reality of our situation.

I sought government aid through Social Assistance but was shockingly denied on the grounds that in Vancouver, a mere \$495 is deemed sufficient to live on. When I called Betty Lou to speak about our predicament, she said she didn't have the time to speak with me, "DENIED," and hung up.

Furthermore, I have applied for long-term disability benefits, citing my stroke and an alarmingly low resting heart rate of 36, which seems concerning for someone of my age group – or any age. Beat heart. BEAT. BOO.

I must clarify that I do not have plans to take my life, although the thought has crossed my mind.

When I expressed my contemplation of suicide online, only one person from my social media network expressed worry. This response, or lack thereof, leads me to believe that I am either not valued or that people are too engrossed in curating their own seemingly perfect lives to truly acknowledge another's suffering, dismissing it as merely a plea for financial help.

I am filled with fear.

Not solely for my story, which pales in comparison to a much larger crisis: the stories of those among us slipping silently through society's cracks, destined to say their silent goodbyes.

My biggest concern is whether I'll even survive long enough to become another one of those stories.

By now, you've likely realized that I'm quite a prolific writer, given the myriad of ideas I've shared with you. Unfortunately, I seem to be missing the mark on what interests you, despite my many attempts.

Regardless, I intend to persevere – if that's all right with you.

Perhaps you'd prefer I didn't, but the old adage goes, **"If you don't try, you didn't try."**

176

And I never give up.

Admittedly, I likely didn't quote that saying perfectly.

In addition, I've attached a PDF titled "Lindsay's Musings," a compilation of stories that explore various trials I've faced, and humanity faces today.

Including one about Tim Horton's using a pressure washer on the downtrodden every morning and an incident with a woman who was audacious enough to declare she'd rather walk behind me for her own safety, even at 3 PM on a bustling street. I don't think I'm scary looking, or is the word sketchy?

Also, a story of how my former employer put my family and myself in a precarious situation. He confessed that what he did was wrong and the cruellest thing he'd ever perpetrated. Unfortunately, his admission didn't come with any financial compensation, so his words, though somewhat consoling, do little to halt my ongoing struggle.

I almost forgot to mention I witnessed my mother's death two times. This haunting experience is tied to my origins in a hidden location—a place where mothers considered unfit due to bearing children out of wedlock were taken. Here, they delivered in secrecy, only to part with their unwanted child if they and their spawn survived the birth, and if they did, their child would either be adopted or sold.

Such matters were shrouded in silence, never to surface. I stumbled upon my connection to this shadowy world in 2003 at the age of 43. The revelation was harrowing, and I wouldn't wish the pain I felt (and still feel) on anyone. Reflecting on it now, I suspect my sense of abandonment stems from those early, unsettling truths.

For now, I'll leave it at that. I truly hope you'll read the PDF (this) and feel inspired to share it—I aim to contribute to making the world a slightly better place, one story at a time.

Warm Regards (for the time being),

Lindsay Wincherauk

• • • • •

Falling Through the Cracks | A Poem | : 1



179

You dare to perch yourself atop a pedestal, as if wrought from moral superiority.

You earnestly clutch the illusion of your own grandeur – you need this belief to sleep at night.

You are no higher than we are. And yet, you grasp onto the comforting deception that your life unfolded from wiser decisions.

We dug our graves; you think in whispered echoes.

I watch the ghost of you fading into the mist, a silhouette against the indifferent sky.

Fear not. My hands are outstretched – not for alms, but for a mere morsel of humanity: your compassion, understanding, and the gentle touch of kindness.

180

Stay your flight. Stand your ground. But the prophecy of your retreat is written in the stars.

Guard your coin. It's your talisman against our shared plight.

My plea is only that you don't tumble from that lofty height.

Let us, the forgotten, disintegrate into dust, dissolve from your world, vanish without a trace. Condemn us with silent verdicts from your ivory towers.

Watch as you claim the city has polished the streets to a sheen – emptied of our shadows.

Ask yourself where the anguish has retreated – do you imagine it lifted with pulled bootstraps? A vanishing ache?

The clang of your indifference, the echo of your oversimplifications – it reverberates through the void.

The pain, it crescendos against the backdrop of a fraying society.

Yet, you insist you are not like us.

Your incredulity at the idea of blaming Mental Health + Addiction – a comfortable lie for those who shun depth.

The narrative is for the comfort of minds that loathe to stir.

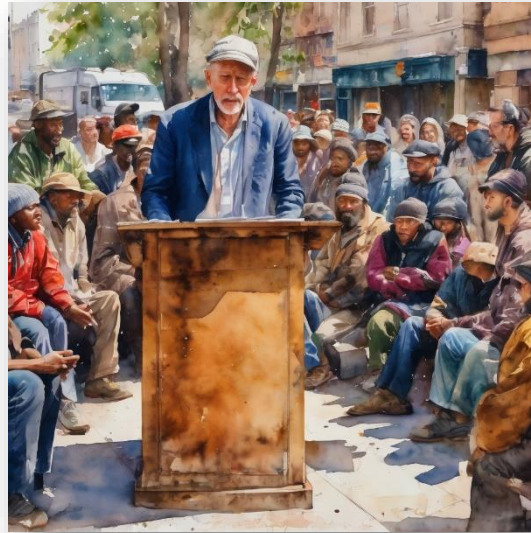
We're crying for aid in a silent scream.
I see the mirage of you dissolving.
Rest your wary spirit. We'll be but memories before long.

Then, you can gather and reminisce about all
the unwanted colour we painted on the canvases of
your lives.

You are not better than us.

.....

Falling Through the Cracks | A Poem | : 2



183

You are not above us—you cannot be. But I grasp your compulsion to feel superior.

You are not above us. Cling to the thought that your choices set you apart – that you stand on some moral high ground. We carved our own scars.

Your figure recedes into the mist of apathy.

Fear not—I claim no alms but the soft currency of your empathy, the gentle touch of your understanding, the warm embrace of your kindness.

184

Resist the urge to vanish into the void.
I feel the pull of your retreat.
Guard your riches.
But I plead not for gold, I plea for your gaze to rest upon our fall.

A

llow us to disintegrate, dissolve into dust, evaporate into
the void.

Cast your swift judgements.

Proclaim the streets cleansed, sanitized by the city's invisible hands.

But ponder – where has our anguish retired?

Have the downtrodden hoisted themselves by imagined straps?

Does the agony simply cease?

Your aloofness echoes, a resounding gong in the chasm of alienation. The suffering swells, crescendos. The structure of our world quivers on the brink.

188

You are not above us.
How convenient, to pin the butterfly of blame on the twin enigmas of Mental Health + Addiction. A sweet lullaby for the torpid spirit.
But salvation is our plea.

Your shadow fades from view. Do not tremble. Our erasure is imminent. In our absence, muse upon the richness our existence lent to yours.

You are not above us.

Farewell.

• • • • •

Falling Through the Cracks | A Poem | : 3



190

You believe you are above us, but you are not. I understand the need to cling to the belief that your choices were superior.

Like us, you are fallible; we have only harmed ourselves.

I watch you pulling away; know that I seek nothing from you
except empathy, understanding, and a touch of kindness.
Yet, you retreat – I anticipate as much.
Guard your riches as I stand firm, not wanting your downfall.

191

While we dissolve into nothingness, swept away into the void, don our ashes.

As the city boasts its cleanliness, you may wonder—where has all the sorrow gone? Do the downtrodden simply lift themselves by their bootstraps, erasing their agony?

Your apathy resounds with deafening simplicity, yet the shared pain only grows.

One can observe society's foundations quivering. We are of the same flesh and blood – your judgments do not elevate you.

193

To ascribe our plight solely to mental health and addiction is a convenient scapegoat for those unwilling to delve deeper.

194

What we need is assistance, but I see you fading into the background – don't fret. Our presence here may not last, and in our absence, you may finally acknowledge our contribution to your existence.

Despite your detachment, our shared humanity remains unaltered.

Farewell.

.....



Before I delve back into the heart of the meeting with #1, let's pause for a moment to breathe, shall we?

Indeed, I had hoped you might suggest that.

My writing—prose, that is, but what exactly constitutes prose?—is admittedly heavy with vivid embellishments. I vow, though, that the poems in **“Falling Through the Cracks,”** while bearing connections to my family's present struggles, serve more as a critique of contemporary society. They are a platform for giving voice to those who are unheard.

When we look around with clarity, how can we not witness our society splintering before us?

I grasp the urge to feel superior to those in agony but be assured: we are all susceptible to breaking, as my family's experience serves as a somber warning.

The outcome for us seems predictable. Our “**friends**” have begun withdrawing, afraid that any attempt to help us might precipitate their downfall. \$\$\$

If those who hosted thirty orphaned Christmases can succumb, what might that imply for everyone else?

You might claim you’re not retreating.

However, a revealing social experiment **I conducted confirmed my suspicions:** most have already distanced themselves, leaving us to fade away into oblivion, with kind words reserved for after our downfall.

200

Your curiosity surely wonders about the nature of this social experiment.

I posted that I intended to live-stream my own death.

The level of concern it raised?

I'll end your wait; exactly one person responded.

And when I broadcast my desperation, when I say that my end is near, the response was typical in our desensitized society – where we paint idyllic portraits of our lives to shield ourselves from the harsh reality – the person in distress is casually asked, “**Do you want to talk?**” But by the time someone hints at such a dire endpoint, talking proves futile; decisive action is essential. Yet another reflection of the despair only magnifies the anguish.



With the last of my strength (my resting heart now rests at 36 beats per minute), I commit to seeking glimmers of hope, despite the engulfing darkness threatening to consume my family's existence.

When I said I would live-stream my death—oh, the bitter irony in 'live-streaming'—I was symbolizing that should I find myself homeless at 63, my doom would be unsealed, not by my own hand, but by the callousness and avarice of society.

I'm not ready to yield. My aim remains to bring you joy.

A month ago, the guilt weighed on me whenever I ate more than one meal a day.

Now, every time I take a bite, selfishness gnaws at my conscience, as though I'm betraying my family by carelessly squandering our limited resources.

Take a moment to really consider that.

204

Poverty does more than strain the budget;
it fundamentally alters your mindset.

The labour required to merely survive in poverty is immense.

Pause and reflect on these truths before passing judgment.

Thank you, Pain, for inspiring me. Let's take another breather.

Not just yet.

Take a walk outside – what do you observe?

Our society resembles an iceberg; stable in appearance above water but disintegrating beneath. This isn't an abrupt catastrophe but a slow erosion. Unless we change the way, we speak and act towards one another, the concept of 'normal life' that we take for granted globally is on the brink of disappearing right before our eyes.

The momentum of downfall has already initiated.

What actions will you take to stop its advancement?

Will you further bury your heads in the sand of denial?

Will you distract your mind with endless streaming?

Will you withdraw to the comfort of your social networks?

Will you ignore the suffering of those on the margins, reassuring yourself with the thought, **"it could never happen to me"**?

But then, artificial intelligence replaces your career. A nascent being renders you redundant, and suddenly, you find yourself a decade older, finally able to understand the pain I've experienced.

I'll tell you my plan: I will persist in telling stories, no matter how unsettling they may become.

.....

.....

In the confusion of life's cruellest challenges, we must ask ourselves: where does despair begin?

Does it stem from the unyielding grip of homelessness and poverty, a breeding ground for countless sufferings?

Perhaps it emerges from the obscure realms of mental health, where the psyche can be a haven but also a cell?

Or is it born of addiction, a brutal loop that forges chains of relief that inevitably tighten around us?

Among these tangled roots, which one initially germinated into the gnarled tree of adversity?

If I had to bet, I'd wager on homelessness and poverty.

.....

O h no.

What happened? I can see it in your eyes; you're planning to delay getting to the meeting now, aren't you?

How can I go? Someone liquidated their assets for a dream cruise that got canceled. They sold their home for this three-year adventure and might have fallen victim to a scam. They must have been so excited, and now they're stranded without a plan.

That's horrible! Did they lose everything? How much did they get from selling their house?

They didn't lose everything – just a \$3,000 deposit and the first installment of \$29,000. But they sold their house for roughly \$500,000. How are they going to rebound from such a loss?

Your tone suggests you're not truly concerned about their plight.

How can you tell? The thought of one more person wandering the streets, facing harsh judgment, will surely keep me up at night.

But you said their loss was only \$32,000.

Yes, so? And that's a lot of only.

I'm no math expert, but...

And I'm not a surgeon.

What are you talking about?

I thought we were stating what we aren't (the game) before discussing the actual topic at hand.

We're not. But even without expertise in math, it's clear the person should still have at least \$470,000 left over from the house sale, plus any other savings.

I know, but they had plans... And now what? Should we set up a GoFundMe for them?

No.

.....

Today, I had an unnerving experience that left me rattled.

Wracked with guilt, I questioned my decision to spend money on lunch given the precarious state of our finances.

As if to add insult to injury, a more troubling event unfolded later on. A disturbing sensation culminated in a horrid discovery: blood, following an innocuous act of passing wind. The revelation struck me when I reached home – there was an alarming amount of it.

Clearly, that's a bad sign, right?

The ludicrousness of worrying about lunch expenses dawned on me.

Shouldn't I be conserving every penny, on the off chance that we return to this earth, perhaps as adorable squirrels? Of course, that's a far more appealing prospect than suffering a Kafkaesque metamorphosis into a cockroach or, in the direst scenario, becoming a chicken – whether free range or otherwise. Have you any idea how many chickens end up on dinner plates annually? Go ahead, hazard a guess.

Is it one trillion?

That's an astonishingly good guess.

So, what do I win for this remarkable estimation?

The prize is a centenarian tortoise – meet Riley!

Incredible!!!

Just one more exclamation mark for enthusiasm.

!

Perfect!

Do you think I might be Charlie Kaufman?

Sure?

But then who would Charlie Kaufman be?

You.

Makes sense. Want to run in a circle?

Sure. Where are we going to run to?

The beginning?

Of what?

The circle.

Can Kafka join us?

He's dead.

Ah, shucks.

• • • • •

I don't want humans to be replaced by machines...

I smell a 'butt' coming....

That's not where coming, comes from. I digress. Penis.

On my way home, I stopped by the market, feeling a tinge of guilt for spending a dollar of what should have gone towards my rent on a can of Coke. That dollar could have been saved for my daily walks... what an absurd thought.

There I was at the counter, setting down my Coke, faced with a store clerk whose presence was as lackluster as her enthusiasm. I got it – the dullness of routine.

But—and here's the inevitable 'but'—she's a store ambassador; our interaction should leave a better impression than that of someone opposed to basic human contact.

With a touch of self-mockery for my error, I noticed that I'd spelled 'opposed' with a 'u'.

I laid out a five-dollar bill and watched the clerk as she struggled to calculate the change for \$5.00. When she did manage, she handed it over wordlessly. Seizing the moment to lighten the mood, I quipped, "I don't need a bag," ⁽¹⁾ only to be met with a grunt.

After our interaction I would much rather be served by a Self Serve Kiosk as opposed to someone in obvious pain because of having to interact with other humans.

- 1) *Every time I've been to the market, including three times when I was just passing through, the cashiers have asked me, "Would you like a bag?" Even when I was only purchasing a bag of chips. Bag of chips. Bag of chips. "Would you like a bag with your bag of chips, Sir?" Bag of chips. Please don't call me, Sir – am I butt bleeding? Never mind. I didn't mean to say that aloud. Passing wind. Ouch.*

• • • • •

I assure you, despite what the tone of my writing might suggest, J and I are not entangled in an intellectual death spiral with the world's woes.

Have you noticed how sentences beginning with “**I assure you**” (2) can often lead to my train of thought derailing, as if my brain has quite literally farted, losing its way mid-sentence?

Could this mental lapse be the culprit behind my rectal seepage?

Let's not dwell on that for now. I'm not a butt doctor.

I want to make it clear that J and I often find ourselves laughing at life's absurdities much more than we brood over the hardships faced by humanity. It is simply challenging to divert one's gaze from the disaster that the state of the world presently represents.

211

Of course, the exception to this is my own personal issue – the aforementioned rectal bleeding.

- 2) The iridescent Pingle Ball and I frequently indulge in boisterous bouts of the 'un-being game,' playfully declaring all that we are not before circling back, with a wink, to the truth we are dancing around. That's the essence of my 'I assure you' ritual – I believed we were simply stretching the game's boundaries. **“I am certainly not a physician.” “And I am most definitely not an attorney.”** Can you grasp the nuance? It's a tangled web we weave, after all.

.....

Upon arriving home today ⁽³⁾, J showed me J's new passport photo. I must move out; I find myself unable to cope with such a sight.

212

3) Today.

Before we revisit the topic of the upcoming (from the past) meeting with #1, would you like a recipe for kimchi?
NO (emphasis on emphatically)!

213

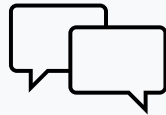
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How to Make Kimchi:

Gather a bunch of cabbage and various ingredients.
Then, partner with someone who's Korean. Let them handle the rest. Enjoy.

Whatever you do, do not look at their passport photo.

.....



Scott (Caucasian): What's J up to?

Me: J's (Korean) at home making Kimchi.

Scott: Is he burying it in the ground. It's not authentic unless it is buried in the ground.

Later

Me: Are you going to bury the Kimchi in the ground (we live on the tenth floor).

J: What?

Me: Scott says it's not authentic unless it's buried in the ground.

J: Tell Scott, Korea has refrigeration.

.....

The Meeting Continuation

Uber Driver Number One (The trip to #1's)



215

Whispers of static envelope the room. A text punctures the silence.
Text: Your Uber arrives in 5 minutes.

A nervous swallow. “Sorry, but I have to bolt.” I’m hastening to confront the architect of my peril, the one who funneled my existence into a vortex of danger.

My emotions churn like a tempest; tears threaten to breach their dams. Expectations hazy, heart erratic.

Text: Your Uber has arrived.
My exit is brisk, urgent.
“Uber for Lindsay?”

“That's me.”

“Jump in.”

The car feels alien, a metal cocoon of unfamiliarity after a three-year hiatus from being inside one. Decision paralysis—back seat? Front seat? I tug open the passenger's door, and ‘Ted’ (I hope that's right) sweeps a binder from the seat in invitation. Front seat, then—an unwitting breach of some unspoken protocol. The repetition of ‘expectation’ rings awkwardly in my mind.

216

Ted swerves into conversation, “I've got this urge, see, to outdrive the dusk, fleeing a shattered heart.”

I mentally raise a shield. And, who talks like that?

“Why are you nursing a broken heart, Ted?”

He confides without pause, finding a captive audience in me. “She left me in the cold night, after nine passionate months, with nothing but echoes. She was the love of my life, but she hungers for the world, seeing me only as a stepping stone. She's lost herself to strangers and their silver. She's banging other guys, sometimes they give her cash.”

Silence feels right.

“Nine weary months, and she’s cast you aside, drowning in others’ shadows; fucking others’ for cash. From my vantage point, liberate yourself from this whorish ghost. They’re paying for a facade. Why languish, Ted?”

“Because love’s grip is fierce. Our roots intertwine; we’re both Persian soil. I know the interloper, his abode. I’m destined to roam tonight.”

Hold your tongue.

“Ted?”

“Listening.”

“Are you taking ESL? A thought – perhaps end your night’s journey with me, then station yourself before his residence, watchful, until the dawn or absolution.”

What game is this?

Inner Voices in disarray – I’ve sown a dreadful suggestion into the heart of a man who bears my reintroduction to this world on wheels.

Are you the villain now?

No, I’m the Oracle dispensing bitter elixirs. We arrive at the abode of opulence known as ‘#1’s.’

“Farewell, Ted. My wish for you is to discover the strength to transcend what doesn’t merit another beat of your heart. For you are worthy of far grander pursuits than mourning a mirage.” Fuck. I’m sounding like Ted.

“Take care, Lindsay. The night is mine to chase. And Lindsay.”

“Yes, Ted.”

“My name is Fasai, not Ted.”

“That makes more sense.”

How to Make Jerk Chicken 🐔:

Embark on a spirited journey to Montego Bay, Jamaica, in the high-spirited company of Wayne and Greg. A planned pitstop in Tampa, Florida, takes an unexpected turn when an innocuous mid-flight fart dastardly morphs into an unsavory bout of rear-end spew, necessitating an emergency purchase of fresh shorts.

Upon touchdown in Montego Bay, we commandeer a taxi for the scenic meander to Negril, the golden froths of Red Stripe beers our trusty companions along this ribbon of road, scratching the edge of the glimmering Caribbean Sea.

Our abode is a haven by the shore, where the caress of the Caribbean sun coaxes us into a foolish drunken stupor upon the sandy embrace of the beach. Over a fortnight, painted in the hues of sunsets and fueled by liquid indulgence, our epicurean quest leads to the divine discovery of a Jerk Chicken artisan.

There, amidst the sizzle and smoke, we feast upon spicy morsels of charred perfection ensconced in foil, with a smear of ketchup to soothe the fire dancing on our tongues.

Amidst this culinary rapture, we find love – not in each other’s eyes, but glistening upon that fiery Jerk Chicken.

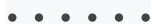
Beneath our table, a nonchalant chicken strolls by, oblivious to our cravings, as we surrender to the tempting allure of chicken sandwiches.

Our tale resumes in Vancouver, where we chase the ghost of that Jamaican zest, armed with jerk seasoning and ambition, only to face the somber truth – a concoction falls short when the soul of Jamaica is not the chef.

Similarly, a visit to the Cactus Club proves futile, as their ‘Jerk Chicken’ plate lacks the authenticity of an island touch, evident it has never basked under the Jamaican sun, nor has it known the hands of its true culinary custodians.

Eventually, the siren call of Jamaica beckons once more. Flying solo, sans any aerial gastrointestinal mishaps, I touch down and hire a cab to Savanna la Mar. This time, I partake in two Red Stripes fewer than our previous “copious” standard and serendipitously connect with a Jamaican family offering more than room – they extend a kinship.

Here, amidst the domestic canvas, every Thursday is hallowed as Jerk Chicken Day. I learn, quickly, to step aside and let them conjure the magic over a grill bedded with pimento wood as a chicken, a familiar rebound of days past, saunters casually through the culinary ballet around us.



The Actual Meeting



We were nearing our destination—the meeting. Fasai hadn't stopped spilling his thoughts to me as we navigated the twisting road to #1's house. Emotionally, I was in turmoil. I reflected on the nature of life, its erratic course brimming with fleeting moments and memories that either soothed the soul or haunted every step. Stripping these episodes from the fabric of my existence, I saw an existential pattern. Existentialism infused my entire life. A recent ancestry check showed my Norwegian heritage dwindling to 44%, down from 48%. Meaning?

219

Perhaps I'll never cross the Öresund Bridge.

My family was on the brink of collapse. Financially, I was a wreck. If I abandon my creative work (dreams), my time will run out fast.

Thankfully, J's faith in me is steadfast.

• • • • •

Flashback to December 9, the previous day. Another Gummy Friday. I had intended to skip the gathering, worn out by the insincere support of some at the gathering. Yet a message from P-Man, the chief offender, drew me in: "Where are you?"

Weakness won over – I went. Arriving at the venue, I felt the sting of a jest made at my expense; the others' awkward denial just confirmed it.

I should have left. Instead, I stayed, mostly silent.

P-Man excused himself and oddly covered his beer with his glasses case. In his absence, I quipped to the table that either he didn't trust us anymore or hoped we'd spike his drink. He had never covered his drink in the previous 10 years. Everyone laughed – it was harmless humour.

220

However, when I shared the joke upon his return, P-Man erupted, ranting about the precautions people take at bars.

Attempting light-heartedness, I explained, "It was a joke. This is the first time you've covered your beer. It's like saying you don't trust us anymore."

Then the blow-up. P-Man accused me of turning negative, lecturing me as if he knew what was best. He sought J's support, who provided none, and tried to rope in the rest of the table. It was futile. Fed up, I stood up for myself, and J and I considered leaving.

Continue the verbal onslaught.

“You’re fine until the gummy bear effect kicks in; then, you just get negative. You’re a decent guy, and once you’ve worked through your issues, you’ll be fine again. I’m tired of wasting my energy on you,” he complains, glancing over at J to enlist his support. “He always does this.” J remains unmoved.

Undeterred, he seeks the validation of everyone at the table. “You all think the same, right? He needs to get over it.”

His rant continues, but it’s not worth recording.

“Enough!” I snap.

“I’ve had it with your constant attacks. You seize on something I say, exaggerate it, and then launch into tearing me apart. I’m fed up. J, are we leaving?” J gives a nod of agreement.

As the server approaches, asking J about ordering a beer, P-Man says dismissively, “No need, they’re on their way out.”

“Why so bitter? It was just a joke,” I say to him, a harmless joke.

“No one’s amused by it. Mayor, did you find it funny?” P-Man challenged.

“I chuckled,” the Mayor admits.

“Everyone laughed. It was just a playful joke, nothing harmful. You, on the other hand, are the one making a big deal over nothing,” I retort.

The tension eventually eases, and P-Man’s version of an apology is to touch my arm as he speaks. He tries to justify his offensive behavior, claiming it’s for my benefit; that by upsetting me, he’s fostering my creativity. I make it clear to him: I don’t appreciate being provoked or mistreated. I also say every time I try to diffuse his angst, it only amplifies his assaults. Despite the friction, J and I decide to stay, and as peace returns, I ponder my significance to our group.

• • • • •

Everyone leaves except for J and me. As we were about to exit, GA approached with a generous offer – a loyalty card with \$260 for groceries on it. I was at a loss for words. Kind souls like GA and Wes in Australia seem to emerge just when darkness looms heaviest. P-Man’s rants occasionally hit a nerve, reminding me to focus not on his verbal assaults but on supportive figures who believe in my potential without deadlines or judgement.

Approaching 64, if not now, when would I chase my dreams?

.....

Nearly two months pass. I keep my word and reach out. He's still struggling.

Unexpectedly, he pitches a business venture in the domestic cannabis industry, eyeing my intellect, life experience and writing talents, and proposes a potential significant role for me.

Touched and intrigued, I will consider the offer, while pondering whether my emotional growth had been genuine, or I was simply an easy target for manipulation once more.

.....

I rapped softly on the door of #1's home, a mix of emotion and resolve steeling my shaky hands.

When #1 opened the door, the thick air was flushed with a sense of genuine respect, and we fell into an earnest embrace, a true moment of connection. The weight of his recent brush with death—a major cardiac event—hung heavily between us. His voice, a frail echo of its former strength, wavered, words tumbling out in fragile disarray.

What unraveled next came as a burst of inspiration—a monologue delivered by #1 himself, a confession spilling forth as if he were the lone actor on a dimly lit stage.

“Step inside. Let's handle this first.” A cheque graced my palm, a modest sum that whispered apologies for the losses we suffered - an amount fivefold what he'd initially promised. Barely enough for us to cling to the shelter of our home through October's chill, but it was something—a flicker of gratitude ignited.

.....

As we settled across from one another at his kitchen island, #1's admission cleaved the air, "I owe you an apology. Our actions towards you... they were cruel beyond measure – the worst I've ever been a part of. It was all wrong, and you undeniably got the short end of it. Your accusations were correct; our business exploited, and you saw right through us. I've always valued your honesty, even when it was hard to hear."

Concern laced my words as they broke the heavy silence, "Are you okay?"

He emitted a crackled laugh that didn't quite reach his eyes, "Hardly. I don't even know if I'll be around much longer. With minimum wage rising, conducting business has lost its appeal," he confided, his voice trailing off into the void of his grand but empty house. The conversation veered, topics leaping like stones over a tumultuous river. We touched on his betrayal, the hurtful words of his associates, and the departure of once-loyal friends and colleagues.

Through it all, the somber realization of his isolation became starkly apparent. And so, I found myself, in the glossy sterility of his labyrinthine home, asking the most ordinary of questions, "Do you have a bathroom?"

My own laughter echoed back at me, ironic and out of place. It was in that private moment, away from our heavy conversation, surrounded by the opulence of #1's bathroom, that I understood. His house, vast and visually stunning, was devoid of warmth – no echoes of laughter, no patter of tiny feet or pets, no spouse's touch. It was an empty shell compared to the vibrant, love-filled 500 square feet I call home.

.....

Returning, the gravity of our conversation deepened as #1 shared the harrowing tale of extortion by his wife and a biker gang – a revelation that painted his loneliness in even starker hues. I pitied him then, seeing this crack in his armor, and felt a compassion I had reserved for few.

As I prepared to leave – the night having slipped away under the weight of our discourse – #1’s facade crumbled, his voice heavy with emotion. “I love you,” he admitted. “You’ve always been a friend.” His words hung in the air like a promise as I assured him of my unwavering support. We hugged a second time.

• • • • •

The brief walk to my waiting Uber was punctuated by reflective tears, blurring the city lights. The night whispered questions of growth or susceptibility, pondering the thin line between them.

In the weeks that followed, I kept my vow, reaching out with a simple text that bridged the silence, hoping beyond hope for a glimmer of recovery in his response.

The return message echoed a reality we both knew too well—the capricious ride of fortune. And yet, within those words lay an offer, a prospect of collaboration in the ever-growing world of domestic cannabis. It was a proposal that flared with potential, his faith in my abilities both flattering and daunting.

227

Could this be a new beginning?

Could I step into a role as President, carving out a future from a shared vision and the promise of ample rewards?

Could this be redemption or another precipice?

Only time will tell.

• • • • •

How to Win an Argument with a Toxic Friend:



229

Why do you have a toxic friend?
.....

How to Win an Argument with Someone You Love:



230

You can't win love.



How to cook Italian Pasta:

Fill a pot with water. Add a pinch of salt and a few drops of non-amorous olive oil. Ignite the burner. Don't make the mistake of dozing off on the couch while the water boils – you don't want to be roused by your partner returning only to find that you've slept through the pot going dry, smoke billowing through the apartment on the very day they discovered their father suffered a cardiac incident and was taken to the hospital.

It's a mystery how the smoke detector failed to wake you. Perhaps it was the alcohol.

Be jolted awake as your partner, in a state of distress, frantically waves a towel to silence the screeching alarm.

Rise. Offer an apology.

Suggest dinner at an Italian restaurant.

• • • • •

Uber Driver Number Two (The return trip)



232

The weight of Lind’s gaze bore into me, the unspoken inquiry resonant in his eyes: why are tears carving paths down your cheeks?

I found no words to share with Sparkly. No answers.

His spectral voice gentle, probing deeper, “What revelations did the meeting unearth for you?”

A sigh escaped me, carrying the weariness of decades. “Perhaps the realization that the world is a profound tapestry of chaos. Our relentless pursuit of prestige, of possessions—mere illusions that fragment our souls, leaving us hollow. Look at both #1 and me.”

Within #1, life's essence has been reduced to a masquerade for the world's stage—a spectacle where personal sacrifice isn't too steep a price, even if it tramples souls beneath its grandeur. But beneath that façade lies fragility — prey to the same caprices of fate as any of us: the transience of wealth, the fleeting embrace of love, the precariousness of health — a beast that prowls with venomous intent, poised to ravage.

233

It's a sorrow that gnaws at the heart; a darkness that suffocates. When the pursuit is mere glitter — a mirage of adulation — it wrecks a hollow grandeur in a mansion echoing with the ghosts of regrets, crying out for redemption for all the needless desires once coveted.

"That's a profound insight," Sparkly breathlessly whispered.

I wonder, is it truly so?

As for me, my existence is shaped by relentless waves of adversity—each new dawn promising fresh torment, lurking in every shadow. But—and here’s the profound ‘but’—despite the terror that petrifies me to the core, I yearn for a world that fosters warmth. No elixirs of wisdom spill from my lips to cure the world’s maladies, yet I cling to the notion that love, viewed through a lens of compassion, might yet prevail. And when I witness the media’s narrative of anguish, the endless conflicts like those in Ukraine, in Gaza, it’s despair that clenches my heart. How can we, as a sentient collective, still spiral into such primitive voids?

Even more troubling is the commercialization of tragedy – corporations weaving their sales pitch into broadcasts of human suffering. Do these news programs serve as harbingers of fear rather than messengers of truth?

235

I collapse into the backseat of my returning Uber. The driver isn't Ted as the app indicated. I observe his turban, surmise that he's Sikh.

"My apologies for being late," he confesses with a rueful chuckle. "A crisis at the Petro-Can demanded my attention. The ordeal preceding mine in the washroom was...catastrophic. I nearly abandoned you to fend for yourself. For that, I'm sorry."

Was his overshare an apology or was it the awkward intimacy of shared humanity?

Emotions surge as I'm conveyed through the city, unnoticed tears my silent companions.

Compelled by ignorance, I blurt, "Where are you from?" The question hangs between us, tainted with racial insensitivity, and I'm immediately sickened by my own thoughtlessness.

His lack of offence suggests a weary familiarity with such ignorance. He's from India, he says simply. I question him about the Uber driving experience.

"Exploited," he states, the weight of the word heavy with truth. He speaks of his journey in Canada, a tale of relentless labour and inevitable betrayal, as each employer finds ways to misuse him, to take advantage of the subtle barrier of language, until he's cast aside time and again.

All he desires is the dignity of honest work, thwarted by the perpetual stigma of an outsider.

I listen, humbled by his candor, learning the value of silence. Our journey is a silent discourse, two civilizations teetering on the brink of mutual understanding.

Arriving home, my emotional reservoirs are depleted. Shelter is secure for another month—a fleeting respite amidst a perpetual cycle of uncertainty.

Read this. Share my story. Be a catalyst in my quest to weave words into a literary legacy. You're here, help eliminate the uncertainty swirling around me, us . . .

In this journey, I seek not just to entertain but to grasp the profound "whys?" of our shared existence.

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How to Make a Romantic Dinner: Minute Steaks with Potatoes stuffed with broccoli smothered in melted cheddar :

Did their love endure?
The answer lies in Minute Steaks, a throwback to simpler days.
Unsure?

Imagine the ritual: a generous seasoning of the minute steaks before they sizzle to perfection in a Tfal pan, flipped repeatedly.

As they dance in their juicy ecstasy, you decapitate a pair of potatoes – unforgiving in their raw state. Hollow them out, but leave the flesh clinging to the sides, a rugged cocoon for the awaiting broccoli.

Precision is key.

Grate the cheese, poised to envelop the potatoes with a comforting blanket of melt.

The moment of arrival. Your heart's counterpart is at the door.

Greet them with a well-timed flip of the steaks and the hiss of a Zima cracked open.

The Pivotal Stage: Swaddle the potatoes in their cheesy armour and entrust them to a 350-degree oven, just until the cheese yields, about four minutes.

Retrieve the golden treasures and execute one final flip of the steaks. Pat them dry from their aromatic bath and arrange them with an artistic flourish beside sprigs of parsley.

Now, unveil your pièce de résistance – the tender, gooey cheesy potatoes – by the steak's side.

Seal the introduction with a soft peck on the cheek.

Anticipation peaks as the first forkful of potato aspires towards expectation... and falters at the crude reality of its raw core.

Mental note: next time, pre-cook the potatoes.

Go to a warm, ambient restaurant with expertly crafted potato skins. Crisis dodged.

The Lifespan of Romance: 16 months.

In the grand tapestry of love, that's quite the journey.

• • • • •

Literally + Surreal

I literally haven't the slightest idea what prose even is.

I literally thought I was teetering on the brink when a bout of the cold or flu had me in its clutches, my throat raging with pain – it literally felt apocalyptic, despite the reality being far less dire.

I've literally had so many non-literal vaccines, I'm now using heroin.

I'm not using heroin, but once when a phlebotomist was drawing my blood, she said, "This is my first time." To which I replied, "I hate needles." After she drew my blood, she asked, "Was that, okay?" To which I replied, "Do you know any heroin dealers?"

Do I need to apologize for that bit?

Only if your audience are junkies.

I think junkies will know the bit is not about them.

I literally never literally almost died from my cold or flu, unless I did, of course, if that happened, I would not finish writing this book.

Colin Jost on Seth Meyer literally said, "The audience were literally laughing aloud." Jost went to Harvard.

Literally, I'm funnier than Colin Jost.

Barely a day had passed since I'd literally walked into Choices and dropped the deadpan line, "I don't need a bag," when a different cashier, literally upon my purchasing a solitary bag of chips, inquired with irony, "Would you literally like a bag for your bag of chips?" Literally.

Purchasing a lottery ticket and then winning a \$55 million jackpot can hardly be called surreal—it's not literally the consequence of playing the game. Declaring such a windfall life-altering is stating the obvious; just reflect on your bank balance before that golden ticket before you speak. Winning a contest, you entered should hardly evoke disbelief—you did toss your hat into the ring.

239

However, if victory found me in a competition (singing) I hadn't entered, now that would be a trip into the surreal.

If I ever had a lottery windfall I would literally after being asked what it feels like:

I hope I would have the stones to say to the inquisitor,
“Go fuck yourself. Come back when you have a better
question.”

My affection for my cat doesn't extend into the realm of the literal, nor does it need to.

Colin Jost just said literally again. His Grandmother died; she was 106. She survived COVID. Colin called her during COVID. She said, "First the Spanish Flu, now this." To which Colin quipped, "It's literally the same as first the Titanic and now the submarine."

He went to Harvard.

My octogenarian friend frowns upon the state of the world, yet he's equally perturbed by those who protest against humanity's injustices. Discussing the tumult between Israel and Palestine, he suggests protesters in Vancouver might make more of an impact if they were active in their countries of origin. They should just be happy to be living here.

I counter that he's skirting dangerously close to saying, "Go back to where you came from." He denies this, but his implications are clear. The tired notion he parrots, "They're killing their own people," echoes the dismissive tropes often used to deflect from the issues faced by disenfranchised non-white communities.

And amidst this all, another tanning salon throws open its doors, pandering to the Caucasian yearning to be anything but what they are.

If you want to sound less stupid:
Please change 'literally' to 'utterly' or anything
else – figuratively, even metaphorically. 242

Once, as I was enjoying a drink at Duke's in Waikiki, I got into a conversation with an older couple. It's ironic—considering that as I age, they might recount this tale, except they'd be referring to me as the older guy they chatted with in Waikiki.

During our talk, a heavy-set man in a tank top sauntered into the bar, his belly, and nipples on display. I couldn't help but pass judgment and remarked that he looked stupid. The gentleman from the couple, in what literally seemed like a moment of Shakespearean fervor, strongly rebuked me, pointing out the offensiveness of labelling someone as "stupid."

Admittedly, I had no knowledge of the man's intelligence. It was purely the unpleasant sight of his exposed nipples that I criticized—though, admittedly, there literally may be some named Chuck who find such a sight appealing.

I realize the use of "Chuck" here isn't literal—it's simply a hypothetical name meant to illustrate a point, perhaps revealing my own biases.

You have a Chuck biases?

I don't think so.

Rewind.
“They're killing their own people.”
“Who's doing that?”
“The Palestinians.”

It seemed he was echoing a familiar refrain used by some Caucasians—the same ones who, when confronted with the repetitious tragedy of innocent black lives being taken at an alarming rate, defensively retort, “They destroy their own neighbourhoods.”

Such statements betray a lingering impulse to dehumanize anyone who doesn't share their pale complexion.

Meanwhile, another tanning salon crops up.

Are tanning salons the epitome of ironic?

244

Caucasians long for the sun-soaked bliss of tropical getaways.

“Wow, you've got a great tan!”

“It's literally, actually, sun damage.”

Colin Jost, actually, went to Harvard.

“Literally, why do black people go outside on sunny days?”

That comment is profoundly offensive, plain, and simple. The term “literally” is superfluous in this context. “Utterly” would be more appropriate.

The nature of racially charged comments is such that they are inherently offensive—no further adjectives or qualifiers are needed. The previous question about black people is not just insensitive; it is flagrantly so. There is no need for the word “literally” to emphasize its nature.

When discussing racially sensitive issues, remarks stand as deeply offensive on their own; they need no embellishment to underscore their gravity.

• • • • •

John Oliver is on Seth Meyers as I type this. He's talking about Britain losing a world cup soccer game and afterward his wife said it's just a game, and he tells her he's going to go outside. Then he tells Seth he walked around Central Park in NYC five times, "I literally walked the loss of he says." Previously he spoke of the Seattle Seahawks losing the Super Bowl in 2015. John said, "The Seahawks literally had no one but themselves to blame for he loss."

245

I LITERALLY SCREAMED.

I LITERALLY DID NOT SCREAM

.....

A mother is walking with her toddler (daughter - I'd guess three years old) and a friend on Vancouver's Seawall. It's a sunny day. I'm walking toward them. The daughter is holding onto her stroller as she walks alongside her mother pushing it. The Seawall is almost empty of humans. Her mother says, "Stop doing what your doing," *she's only walking*, "or I will embarrass you in front of all of these people."

246

Her daughter stops and looks at her and says, "I don't know any of these people."

.....

Winner! Winner!

I t's a glorious Monday morning. I eagerly open my email inbox, brimming with anticipation. What treasures await me this time? I've hit the jackpot!!!

First up, a notification about "Temu Rewards" greets me - a new term for my vocabulary, so I take a moment to add it. There's also a surprising message claiming I've been selected winner of a Costco sweepstake, despite not being a member. I'll have to revisit that email later. My luck seems to be on a roll with not just one, but two major casino winnings following. And apparently, I'm now also eligible to extend a SiriusXM Membership I never signed up for. Another win from a casino pops up, followed by yet another "Temu Rewards" message. A Canadian Tire offer arrives, curiously written in French, and according to the post office, they're having trouble delivering parcels I wasn't even expecting. More casino victories flood in. Walmart generously offers me \$1,000, and Dicks Sporting Goods declares that I've won a Stanley Tumbler. To cap it off, FedEx has not one, but two packages waiting for me.

247

I must be the luckiest person alive!

I decide to tackle opening all these emails later.

With a twinkle in my eye, I contemplate the slim chance of them being scams.

Impossible. It's clear that I've been specially selected for these windfalls!

I gleefully plan the reception of the second batch of winnings by noon, and the third by six in the evening.

Perhaps it's time to consider opening my own store with all these prizes.

I knew there was a reason to get up today!

• • • • •

Mental Health + Addiction



248

In a world teetering on the brink of collective madness, one could argue that sanity itself is a myth—a myth as elusive as peace. Beyond the mundane march of our daily lives unfurls a cacophony at the edge of perception; the persistent buzz of societal noise, seeping in like an unshakable melody, constantly chewing at the edges of our sanity, cloaking us in layers of superficial judgment.

249

We are all but novices, masquerading as experts in the craft of dictating what's best for others — what's best for the world, for our very survival. Yet, within this arrogance, one can't help but wonder: What do we truly understand?

As I venture through the city streets, the desolation is palpable. We avert our gaze from the suffering we pass, denying our silent role in fostering this dystopian scene. Far too often, we choose to dissect an individual's torment as though it were something to be understood and solved from a distance, as if suffering could be quantified, sliced so finely that it becomes invisible.

For those engulfed in pain, their cries for help become an act of sanity in an insane world, a clarion call for compassion, begging us to awaken and act.

250

Yet, we stand immobilized. We recoil into the solace of self-absorption, where the world's dissonances fade to a mere bass line, humming in the background of our consciousness.

"They've done this to themselves," some would muse.

"It's mental illness. Drug problems. They're just damaged."

They were once children.

Think of the children.

I hear the stale dialogues of disillusioned middle-aged men, waxing lyrical about the latest hockey escapades of our local team, diverting the focus from the raw wounds of homelessness to the sanitized halls of institutionalization – as if sweeping suffering under the rug absolved us of responsibility.

Meanwhile, celebrities serenade us with tales of heartbreak (Swift) and fortune (Ohatani), their wealth a stark contrast to the countless indigent souls lining the route to the stadiums where they perform.

Rivulets of human decay flow silently by – men and women driven to numb their existence against the biting cold and relentless hunger. For them, the allure of another hit, another fleeting escape, is an understandable reprieve.

Our collective apathy is as evident as the automated (by automated, I mean by begging) door that swishes open at the 7-Eleven – only on the days when it falters do we notice its existence, much like the destitute who once stood there.

252

Not long ago, I loathed those interactions. Now, empathy tugs at my conscience, compelling me to ponder how I might endure if I too were cast into the chasm of street life. What would become of me?

I have no answer.

At the park opposite my abode, a playground once teeming with innocence is now patrolled by officers, guardians of societal norms, ready to whisk away any suffering soul who dares tarnish the sanctity of childhood with their presence.

Our cultural script is starkly black and white: fail to thrive, and you're tacitly stamped with the label of mental illness or addiction. The subtleties of human struggle are distilled into convenient binaries.

253

News reports tout government initiatives—dental care for octogenarians claiming the headlines—but I’m left wondering if such token offerings truly make a dent in the vast expanse of human need. Is it enough?

254

It’s the bare minimum—the very bare minimum, despite my loathing for that word ‘very.’

And so, I question my own mental fortitude.
With unemployment breathing down my neck,
threatening to cast me into the abyss of homelessness, I
can't help but suspect that an encounter with that void
may push me toward the very vices we stigmatize.

"You're stronger than that," they say.

But am I?

Indeed, how can any of us escape the threat of mental
distress?

Take my tale, for example. I entered this world in a place where unwed mothers were ostracized, their 'bastard' offspring swiftly torn away, only to be trafficked into adoption, all in the name of rectifying their 'error' and protecting the façade of family and church.

It was reflective of the times.

The stigma of mental illness is deeply woven into our history, casting long shadows over my lineage. Forced to live a life founded on deception regarding my origins, the truth eventually surfaced, leaving me to assemble the fragmented pieces of my identity, alone.

Did my family do their best by concealing the truth?

256

No, they did far from their best.

All I ever did was come into being.

Despite carving out a semblance of life for myself, there always seemed to be a void, a missing link whose absence left me perennially susceptible—exposed to exploitation and betrayal under the guise of fostering personal growth.

I tire of granting amnesty to toxic friends and corrupt employers who exploit my inherent insecurities, who take me for granted time and time again, all the while pretending it's for my own good.

It's time I muster the courage to reject their venomous bonds.

As my family's world teeters on the precipice of collapse, the media paints a narrative of self-infliction—ignoring the systemic rot, the societal schisms that cast the less fortunate aside with cold indifference.

We need a societal reawakening.

Ironically, I do harbour a fondness for the pop anthems of Taylor Swift and the athletic prowess of baseball giants like Shohei Ohtani. They entertain, they distract.

Yet, I can't shake the correlation between their stardom and the shadow it casts on the ever-growing epidemic of societal neglect.

A wraithlike specter drifts past, its ethereal form barely disturbing the world around it, as if woven from the fabric of settings long forgotten. This apparition, an unwelcome companion tethered to my very soul since my first breath, eludes me in a chilling silent dance. A pursuit beckons me, its origin obscure, yet a whisper within insists it might be the lingering essence of the father I never knew.

The morrow brings the frozen embrace of December 12th, a day marked by grim anniversaries.

It is the haunting echo of the winter's day when I witnessed the life flicker out of my mother's eyes (1987) for a harrowing first time.

That same cursed date in 2021 severed the last familial bond with the death of my last-living aunt (sister).

And a year prior, the shadows of December claimed an old flatmate of mine, snatched by fate's cruel hands a decades before his time.

Amid the ruins of my peace, I often ponder my own state of being.

Am I okay?

The answer crashes through me like the winter's bite.

No.

And yet, amidst this tapestry of loss and spectral hauntings, Ohatani basks in the relentless flood of fortune, reaping \$133.18 each ceaseless minute, an opulent river that flows without end.

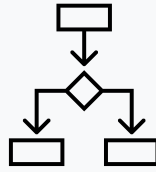
He had better pick up the lunch tab.

I wonder what he did this morning?

I wrote this.

.....

A Comparison



Me: A record holding, city, provincial, national champion quarterback, who happens to be blind in one eye, who happens to be in three sporting halls of fame.

Shohei Ohatani: A twenty-nine-year-old generational baseball talent.

	ME (63.5-years-old)	Ohatani (29-years-old)
Annual Salary	\$5,940 for being old	\$70,000,000
Monthly	\$495.00	\$5,833,333.33
Weekly	\$114.23	\$1,346,153.84
Daily	\$16.27	\$191,780.82
Hourly	\$0.68	\$7,990.87
Minute	\$0.11	\$133.18
Second	(e-4)	\$2.22
Halls of Fame	3	0
Number of Books Written in Past Year	16	Unknown
Team Telling Him to be a Good Person to protect Image	No	Yes
Mental Health Challenges	Yes	Absolutely
Time to earn my entire yearly income.	One Year	44.6 minutes
Homelessness?	Imminent	n/a
\$45 Bus Pass @ 60 (if poor enough)	Maybe	n/a
Free Local University @ 65 (audit)	Maybe	n/a
Free Dental Care @ 87	Maybe	n/a

Winner! Winner! Afternoon Prize Dump (Monday, December 11, 2023)

I must admit, after my walk earlier today – despite inhaling what was surely less-than-fresh air (cough) – my throat is sore. I’ve got a doctor’s appointment on Wednesday. I suppose I’ll have to call in sick for. Oh, the irony.

Right now, I’m grappling with a sense of ennui – what a fabulous word.

Why the sense of disinterest, you might ask?

Well, I expected to come back to a plethora of prize notifications. Instead, my inbox only boasted four substantial wins.

Firstly, there was yet another jackpot from the casino. Then, an offer for complimentary accommodations at one of Paris’s not the city but the spoiled brat’s family hotels. Next, an alert from I-Cloud security intimating that I might be a security risk – comparable to a toddler on the Seawall, I suppose, given that these people are strangers to me. This parade of fortune ended with a message in French (Vous avez été accueilli avec des tours gratuits!), which simply adds to the charm. Sounds impressive, doesn’t it?

I decided to run it through a language translator and discovered it means: “You have been greeted with free spins!”

Fantastic – free spins are exactly what I’ve always wanted.

This is all wonderfully timed, because tomorrow I plan on investing in a ‘brick-and-mortar sell my winnings store,’ store!

I’m utterly convinced that none of this is too good to be true or a scam.

• • • • •

Keep Buying Shoes

I've grown weary of chronicling the relentless tide of spam that clogs my inbox. Mundane as it may seem, one has to wonder what kind of soulless beings prey on the elderly's fragile trust? The question is rhetorical, of course – the answer, sadly, lies within the query itself.

As I ponder this somber thought, an ad for Life Insurance flickers mockingly at the periphery of my computer screen. It taunts with a sinister cheerfulness, "Over 50? Still breathing? Congratulations! You're eligible to give us your money!"

There's an attempt to cloak the gravity of death with humour, but all I envision are the futile struggles of loved ones trying to claim what was rightfully promised.

"Grandpa, you left us with a gift – the Life Insurance – but now that you're gone, the company has decided you're not worth it. Your voice is sorely needed to set things right."

Imagine the audacity: "You're over 50, you've secured our insurance for that elusive peace of mind. But when the reaper calls, why bother about claims? Surely your grieving family's pursuit of owed benefits is a sign of their greed, not their love."

Is it just me, or does this scene give anyone else the creeps? Here, the living are attempting to communicate with the dead, all in a bizarre effort to acquire money.

But let's escape these dismal thoughts.

We're currently entranced by the Netflix series, "On The Verge" – a delightful distraction. It centers on women, all on the crest of forty, threading their way through life's mazes. One poses a query to Siri, "Siri, career changes for women over 40?"

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The digital oracle has spoken, offering a singular path: "Office administrator, office administrator, or office administrator."

Siri's limited vision is nothing if not consistent.

Curious, I challenge Google with a similar question. “What career paths beckon men in their sixties?”

The answer is a lukewarm, “Seek out who hires the time-worn, and approach with a confidence as unwavering as your youth.”

I’m not making this up. Certainly, the undercurrent of the message might as well have been a stark and unsympathetic command, “FORFEND THE ADVANCE OF TIME” or, in a more offhand and mocking tone, a breezy “FARE THEE WELL IN YOUR TWILIGHT YEARS, ANCIENT ONE.”

I just received a PING (notification) I am the first person ever to use the word ‘forfened.’

We’ve been served cold, hard advice – it seems after the festive glow of fifty fades, around fifty, or the moment you first reach for support with intimacy (at 23 for Stanley), society deems us ready for the final curtain. This, I refuse to delve deeper into, fearing the archaic roots of the terms ‘retirement’ and ‘dysfunction.’

From the advice I’ve received, it seems there’s this expectation that when we reach a certain age – around 50 or so – we’re supposed to not just retire but fade away into obsolescence, almost as if we’re meant to die.

It brings to mind the drastic ritual in the movie “Midsommar,” though I’m not interested in tracing the origin of this morbid concept. For some, like Stanley, this perceived expiration date arrives absurdly early.

However, there appears to be one peculiar exception to this rule: if you’re a frequent buyer of shoes, your social relevance seems to get a reprieve. Your worth becomes as up-to-date as your latest shoe acquisition.

Bizarrely enough, in our society, this counts as a fact.

So, you want to live a golden life, keep buying shoes.

We are only as relevant as our most recent shoe purchase.



STOP!

I implore you to halt, and I do so with urgency—a plea underscored by the intensity of the word 'implore' itself.

On the edges of my computer screen, the newscasters deliver their reports with an air of detached professionalism.

They begin with the traffic update: “The accident on Knight Street Bridge has been cleared, so commuters can expect smooth sailing ahead. There is no need for concern about the individuals involved in the wreckage—they didn’t survive the incident. A dead flower memorial will be set down at the accident site later in the day. Soon to be covered in soot.”

The newscasters then pivot to the core issue at hand, one of demographic shifts and governmental headaches:

“In the not-so-distant future, everyone in British Columbia will be over the age of 65. And by ‘everyone,’ all those who are over 65, which if the ones on the cusp, like me (the newscaster didn’t say ‘me’) make it, there will be a whack of us methane producing geezers for the government to deal with. This aging population will undoubtedly present a myriad of challenges for governments to tackle.”

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MONEY!

Dr. Kevorkian.

The translation, boiled down to its essence, is simple: OLD PEOPLE ARE EXPENSIVE.

Perhaps, there is an ‘easy’ solution—seniors should pay the full price for their coffees at fast-food joints.

It’s an idea that strikes me as cruel.

Yet, in the grand scheme of things, who would really take notice?

Seniors aren’t fast runners.

That doesn’t make sense.

Your face.

J and I are on a quest; publishers who send me books often include duplicate copies for me to share as gifts. Just yesterday, we distributed three.

The second one we offered up within the bustling confines of a popular coffee chain. It was J who chose who would receive it – a shop worker whose age couldn't have been less than seventy, bent over before me, faintly resembling a wisp of a ghost as he swept the floor. I couldn't be certain J had even noticed him. I also wasn't entirely sure if he was still breathing.

Upon laying eyes on the man, two conflicting emotions arose in me: admiration for the chain's decision to employ (a likely created position) this elderly, barely animate figure, and repulsion at the thought of them forcing someone so frail to labour.

A third thought wedged itself in – grimly pragmatic, wondering if I might be a suitable candidate to fill his shoes, should a position open up.

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Could I envision my final days spent pushing a broom across the floor of a coffee shop for eight solid hours?

Was this an act of compassion or an act of cruelty – akin to banishing an old person to a work camp?

Hold back your judgments – those that might suggest he relishes the customer interactions. **HE. DOES. NOT.**

And it's all too likely that his manager, be it a Tiffany or a Chad, would reprimand him with a trite "If you lean, you clean. No chatting with the customers."

As I pondered this, I found myself hoping that Lloyd – the sweeper – had his life insurance in order.

I'll go back tomorrow with my resume, I'll have to amend it to stress my love of sweeping, because they sure as hell won't let me near the coffee makers.

When I was a bartender, I used to get, something rhyming with 'paid,' starting with an 'I' a lot.

I wonder if it's the same for Lloyd, the old guy, I named him Lloyd.

KEEP BUYING SHOES



267

.....

The Perks of Aging

- Once your over 60 and poor enough, you may qualify for a \$45 annual bus pass.
- If you live to be 65, you can take classes at the local university (audit) for free. (Unverified).
- If you live to be 87, you may qualify for free dental care and once again be able to enjoy The Reaper's toxin sugar again – if you still have teeth.
- I spelled teeth with an 'a' above.

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A CBC FOLLOW UP

Hello CBC,

Story Idea: Keep Buying Shoes (How to Live Into Your Golden Years)

I recognize that the chances of CBC, or anyone for that matter, picking up my story ideas are slim.

However, I refuse to give up.

Nearing homelessness, as a man in my sixties facing the grim prospect of dying on the streets after fruitlessly applying for over 280 jobs, I cling to a sense of dark humour in my plight.

Despite suffering from what some may call the affliction of consciousness and grappling with the compelling urge to keep living, I don't believe these aspects of my mental state justify an end spent alone on the frigid pavement.

I encourage you to read today's piece (attached), **"Keep Buying Shoes"** – I'm confident it will at least elicit a chuckle.

Converting this narrative onto the screen may be a challenge, but I trust it's not beyond your abilities. On a note of assurance, it's not that I'm eager to sweep floors at a coffee shop. In truth, I don't feel suited for it, just as I evidently didn't possess the qualifications to work in a copy room—despite a potential employer acknowledging my notable background, it still somehow fell short of allowing me to press the copy or scan button.

Should CBC be inclined to lend a hand in keeping me sheltered, perhaps they might consider crafting a bespoke position where I can channel my creativity through sweeping.

Thank you for considering my words.

Warm Regards,

Lindsay Wincherauk

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Lindsay Wincherauk

WES

The wheels of our plane kissed Montego Bay tarmac, time-traveling us back to 1990, or so I think. We were greeted by the thick, tropical hug of Jamaica's air – 33 degrees of heat wrapped in a staggering 376% humidity.

A welcoming committee of harmonizing Jamaican women serenaded us, their vibrant voices slicing through the sultry atmosphere – a captivating, albeit slightly stereotypical, reception.

Wes, the seasoned globe-trotter whose passport stamps rivaled my teenage sticker collection, which I never had, was beside me, as well as a peculiar fellow named Greg – a man of modest stature at four-foot-eleven, but also a giant target for our juvenile jests, especially over his unapologetic love for country twang.

In the carefree world of '90s customs, where being pale and pulse-possessing meant all systems go, we approached the makeshift checkpoint: two stern Jamaican Custom Officers manning a lone folding table – it's 'Custom Officers,' with a capital 'C' and 'O.'

Is that a rule?

It feels right.

While lining up, I steal a moment to think about Wes.

Side Moment: Wes is a seasoned veteran of travel, having been to 43 countries ⁽¹⁾. that's a guess, A quick text is all it would take to verify Wes's country count – shall I pause for accuracy's sake? No, let's not dawdle; the tally can always come later.]

When his turn came, they barely glanced his way to confirm his very existence – a cursory pulse check and a request for ID. His search was comical, ending when he unearthed an expired library card stuck to the bottom (inside) of his bag, now tied to a stringy, unidentifiable goop.

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The Customs Agent's wave-off at that sight was almost animated – no need for a card when you've got such a convincing glob as evidence of... something.

Flip-flops saved us, then, though for the life of me, I can't fathom why it mattered – unless you're Greg, sporting a thong for reasons of his own, which also has no relevance to this story except for it's where my digits landed on the keys.

1) 49 countries.

A bit about Wes: In the woven tapestry of fate, a soul akin to kindred ties found sanctuary in adoption, much like his sister, Corrie—once the keeper of my heartbeats, who stretched across the horizon of my memories as both the lengthiest tale of passion and the loftiest in stature. An enigma, Corrie pledged allegiance to the green and growing things of the earth, yet she harboured a clandestine affair with the siren call of McDonald’s cheeseburgers. But whether these confessions belong in the chronicles of my own narration is a thread I dare not pull. ⁽¹⁾

Fast forward through his tales across continents, Wes finally anchored his wandering soul in Australia, with Libby, the love that grounded him, their two children, an equal number of dogs, and zero pet kangaroos, despite what children’s books might have you believe. Wes’s life was a canvas of freedom, his brushstrokes bold and adventurous. Until that one unforeseen twist of fate...

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- 1) The essence of this beautiful passage is that Wes is a kindred spirit. Our paths crossed because he is Corrie’s brother—and he still is. I consider myself fortunate to be acquainted with them both.

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Late last year, 2022 – I will let 9AU News (National) tell the story.

Wes Raddysh is one patient whose life is back on track after a serious motorbike accident a year ago.

He was on his way to an interview for his dream job as a ferry skipper in Noosa after retiring to the Sunshine Coast.

Wes Raddysh is one patient whose life is back on track after a serious motorbike accident a year ago.

He was on his way to an interview for his dream job as a ferry skipper in Noosa after retiring to the Sunshine Coast.

“But then you start thinking past that and you think ‘jeez, well I’m not done doing what I want to do’.”

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Raddysh began his recovery journey which involved trying to use prosthetic legs - something he says was a frustrating experience.

“They didn’t seem to work well, they weren’t fitting well, there was a lot of pain involved. I couldn’t walk, I got up to a couple hundred metres maximum and thought this is not great.”

Three months ago, a breakthrough came when Raddysh was given access to new technology at the Royal Brisbane and Women’s Hospital.

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Raddysh couldn't be more grateful for the donations from generous Queenslanders.

He was able to reschedule the ferry skipper interview he missed and was offered the job.

But even more satisfying, he's become active again after years of previously training for running and cycling marathons.

"I paddle boarded down in Sydney on the weekend which was fantastic," Raddysh said.

"I'm getting back on the bike next week - they've made me another leg with a cut out the back so I can actually bend my knee more to do that. I booked a cycling event for next April, so I'd better get fit for that."

Raddysh's wife Libby has noticed her husband's renewed optimism.

"It means everything to be up and get mobile and get on with life the way you were," she said.

Raddysh agrees it's given him a new lease on life.

"I was at the point of giving up, you know," he said.

"You read a lot of things about people that never wear a prosthetic leg or they're eight years on and can't walk more than ten feet and stuff like that so that was a game changer. It's giving me hope again."

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We all need a Wes in our lives.

Thank you, Wes, for being mine.

Oh, I forgot to tell you about our time in Jamaica.

We bought a hotel . . . almost.

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THIS PAGE IS PALPABLE

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Why on earth would you weave tales of your friend Wes into this maelstrom? He seems anchored in the mundane fray of the real world, while we're embroiled in a surreal saga of beasts tearing flesh asunder – a narration palpably tinged with the fantastical. Wes's inexplicable odyssey across continents, defying the very bounds of our story's logic, contributes to the bafflement. And yes, I am stressing how utterly nonsensical, rather than sensually nonsensical, his presence feels. You're on the precipice of alienating your audience, flinging them into confusion – how do you justify this bewildering deviation?

In search of the 'flying ark', you say?

That's your defense?

Understand, this story is woven from the yarns of imagination – I have faith that my sagacious readers can navigate it. And I nearly fell into the trap of misusing 'fallow,' a word indeed.

What does 'fallow' connote?

To fallow. Do you connote me?

What the fuck does 'connote' connote?

Your meaning escapes me.

Well, indulge in a bit of research on your own.

Wes is a beacon of resilience, a one-legged man striding forth with a prosthetic – a tale of inspiration interlaced with reality. Yet you insist it disrupts our narrative flow. Says who?

WHY IS THIS HERE?

It needed a home. Patience, my friend, more Wes-centric revelations loom on the horizon as I continue – not Noah’s, just wait for it...

Are you still holding your breath?

Over here, as always.

Wes’s Arc, an ark of never-ending happiness, where you can always see the sun . . .

278

Prince?

Indeed.

You do realize, Wes is the fabled courier, shuttling the Animal Kingdom to the utopia that is Foodville – how else could you imagine their journey?

Honestly, I hadn’t pondered that.

Visualize me defying time, soaring in reverse through the skies, higher and higher...

And then the biting sting of reality – ouch. That smarts.

In 1988, I journeyed from Winnipeg to Saskatoon, fresh from a job interview. Alone in a cavernous airplane, save for the five flight attendants and the pilots shrouded behind the cockpit door. An acquaintance among the crew took a seat next to me, as we traversed the clouds—nothing evolved but conversations exchanged.

279

This happened.

The whole plane to myself. Except of course, for my staff.

Touchdown.

November 1988 found me beside Tony Papageorgiou, En route to Minneapolis to see the Saints play the Vikings. A chance reunion with a familiar flight attendant (Tammy, I think, she was blonde) led to an impromptu kiss – surprising, but true.

Tony and I meandered along Hennepin Avenue at the witching hour, a little inebriated and unfazed by three strangers in need. Black men. We don't have many black people in Saskatoon.

Is this becoming racist?

I don't know, I'm white.

I pull out a stack of cash, Tony pulls out a much larger stack. I give Reg, black Reg from St. Louis – \$10. Tony gives Reg's friend, Bob, black Bob from (unknown) \$50, – no harm befell us.

280

This happened.

Then, the voracity of consumerism (the following day): Tony amassed 700 record albums in a St Paul's record emporium (we were there for five hours – I hated Tony), and an eye-watering \$10,000 wardrobe (he bought the clothes at a department store – the record store was sold out), while I settled for a soda, from a corner store, oddly in the middle of he block.

Heading home, Tony's hoard aroused Saskatoon's customs' curiosity, yet he breezed through with a simple denial of goods to declare – this happened.

“Welcome home, Tony.”

It's March 1989 in Regina, and I'm on my way to Vancouver to catch up with Wes. I reach the airplane door, and after a couple of knocks, it swings open. A flight attendant I don't recognize is there to greet me.

"Hello, how may I help you?" she asks.

"Is this flight heading to Vancouver?" I confirm.

"Yes, we're about to depart shortly," she replies.

"I should be on this flight," I say, slightly anxious.

She asks for my boarding pass, checks it, and nods.

"Ah, yes, you're in seat 14D."

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As I make my way down the aisle to my seat, I can feel the eyes of other passengers on me. It's an uncomfortable walk to row 14, where I eventually find my seat.

"Excuse me, I'm in seat D," I say to the person occupying the seat next to mine.

14C replies with a huff, "I'm going to be late for dinner."

"Sorry for the delay," I apologize.

"The line for boarding was confusing; they kept announcing the final call for Vancouver, but the people in front of me were all bound for Calgary. After asking, they kindly let me jump ahead. I had to sprint to Gate 2, out of only two gates we have here. By the way, what's for dinner?"

After landing in Vancouver, Wes insists that we go out and drink, so that's what we do – and we don't hold back. We end up at a club called Luvafair, crowded predominantly with men. Although Wes isn't gay, he suggests we dance and, in my drunken state, I agree. I can't help but notice the risqué images flashing on the walls – it's 'Bad Boys' night – and we dance awkwardly, as you might expect from people from Saskatchewan.

Later, we exit the club and, mid-way across the Burrard Street Bridge, Wes tells the cab to pull over. We get out and find ourselves walking on a vast expanse that seems almost like an ocean without water. Luxury homes tower above us as we travel across the sandy stretch. When we near Alma Street, we have to climb a wall to reach street level and finally make our way to Wes's place to sleep off the night's excesses.

282

The next day, as we revisit our journey, I'm puzzled. "Wes, weren't we walking out there yesterday, where the ocean seems to be?" I ask.

"Yeah, that was low tide," he casually responds.

"Low tide? We don't have low tide in Saskatchewan, or oceans," I remark.

We're currently in Whistler, joined by Wes and another friend, Kerry. It's my first-time skiing in a decade, a challenging return after multiple knee surgeries.

Wes, ever the adventurer, leads me to the summit of the mountain. "Let's try this path," he suggests with a mischievous glint in his eye.

However, I hesitate, noting the warning. "But Wes, the sign clearly states it's out of bounds."

Ignoring the suggestion, Wes speeds off and I reluctantly follow. My protests go unheeded as my knee sharply disagrees with the decision.

Moments later, I'm submerged in snow up to my neck, a stark reminder of my 6-foot frame that's now awkwardly perched above skis buried another six feet below.

Fighting my way out of the engulfing powder, I struggle to stand, pain surging with every movement.

"Wes..." I manage to call out feebly.

A bear, coming out of hibernation, walks by and shakes its head.

Eventually, I locate a road and painstakingly traverse it, falling and wincing in pain with each turn.

After an excruciating two hours, the base camp comes into view where Wes and Kerry nonchalantly sit on a patio, beers in hand.

Catching sight of me, Wes remarks without a hint of concern, "It took you long enough."

A year after that trip, Wes and I become roommates. He introduces me to a woman – her name might’ve been Carla. In an unconventional first, Carla and I end up having sex while ‘The Simpsons’ plays in the background, marking my first encounter with the iconic show.

Now the question looms: will we ever return to ‘Foodville’?

This story needed to be preserved, so I’ve tucked it away here. While I can’t promise it will remain solely in this spot – I might decide to move it in the hopes that it will entice you to read more of my work elsewhere – it might also remain, or I could have placed copies in other places too. Whatever the case, it’s cool.

284

But hey, where did you disappear to?

Over here.

.....

Hey, you!
H

Here.

Yes, you there, adrift on this uncharted stream. Come hither to the roaring symphony of nature's veins.

Are you the only one?

No.

Here.

Here.

Here x many.

Here.

How fierce are these waters?

I'm no aficionado of the torrents—perhaps they roar at a formidable Level 5?

285

Nice helmet, Colonel Clink.

Oh, please spare me the insult. Your egregiousness, though misplaced—the helmet highlights my eyes.

But may we sidestep the tired trope?

Where, pray tell, have we been deposited?

Nestled on a riverbank, close to Squamish's heart. Danielle, my third-wheel-date, unwittingly casts me into the abyss of third-wheel purgatory.

Confound you, articulate yourself!

Nay, let the mystery linger.

So be it.

Dive into the rushing blue, where time ceases, and only the liquid rhythm speaks.

The date scrawled here reads **13 December 2023**, a mere whisper against the fabric of eternity.

“Shh, I’m on the phone with my cardiologist; I need to listen. Don’t distract me,” I mutter.

“Hello, Lindsay, this is Dr. Lee.”

“Hi, Dr. Lee.”

After a couple more redundant hellos, we move on.

“How are you feeling, Lindsay?”

“Okay, except I’ve caught a nasty cold.”

“Sorry to hear that. Did you get your vaccines?”

“Yeah, and I’ve even started on heroin,” I joke.

286

The joke seems to hit its mark, but immediately I feel guilty for making light of addiction issues. Mentally, I scold myself for the insensitive humour, but then I rectify it aloud, “I’m not actually using heroin.”

A syringe falls from my arm.

Heroin is a dark beast.

“I know,” Dr. Lee assures. He updates me that my heart results look good and hints that our doctor-patient relationship might be nearing its end.

When I jokingly ask if he’s breaking up with me, he replies lightheartedly.

We discuss my surprisingly low heart rate, but he isn’t concerned due to my fitness levels. I don’t mention my poor diet that contradicts this.

Dr. Lee compliments my creativity as I humorously narrate our 'breakup.' When he tells me he's moving to Alberta, I jokingly accuse him of being unable to bear the separation.

I find speaking with my doctors is as effortless as breathing, similar to how I felt while speaking with my incompetent lawyer.

You are just being mean.

No, my legal team were nothing more than Ambulance Chasers. *A lawyer got to get paid*—don't believe the television ads: If you are over 50 and still alive. You are still alive, and we want your money.

As we continue to chat, I share my fervent activities to combat stress and my writings about society's ills.

Dr. Lee encourages me to keep at it despite my dark humour about the internet and losing fingers to heroin— which makes him laugh, though I'm not entirely joking. And it doesn't make any sense.

287

I was put on this earth do something special; do you know what that is?

Doctor Lee isn't taking our breakup well.

He can't bare to stay close to me and not see me. He's moving to Alberta.

Are you delusional?

Your face looks like a gravel road.

What?

Never mind.

Television Life Insurance Advertisement
TELEVISION LIFE INSURANCE ADVERTISEMENT

If you are over 50 and still alive. You are still 288
alive, and we want your money.

... ..

I think it is time to blow this popsicle stand and blast to the past.



289

Don't you mean it's time to bounce?

Don't you think you are a little dated, who says bounce anymore?

The popsicle stick lands.

As we wish each other well in our farewells, I can't help but play with words and idioms, making one last jest about leaving and outdated slang – which ends up being the last pun standing.

Medical Overtime (Not like Bill Maher)
The medical odyssey concludes, but does it indeed?
In truth, we are peers in this dance of intellect and inquiry.

“How do you stand, amidst the storm?” he inquires,
lingering on the line.

Stress is the storm that rages, but I weather it through sweat-laden sojourns and the pen’s mighty stroke. Perhaps in distant Alberta, you’ll spy my name glittering on the bestseller’s list.

A hopeful nod, a silent vow to look.

My words crescendo, a relentless tide against fading indifference, highlighting the plight of an aging generation falling prey to society’s monsters.

Write on, he urges.

So, I shall – till the lights of the web dim and my fingers dance no more.

The shadow of addiction prowls in the pause of our laughter.

We impart wishes wrapped in the cloth of custom.

The tenure of life-no-more forsworn by the medic’s leave.

THIS IS HOW I LIKE TO TELL STORIES! 291

Did you just ask me how old my dog is?

Yes.

292

Why?

I don't have a dog.

293

What's new, Lindsay?
Do you have a notepad and pen?
No.
Ask something else.

294

A return to the days of yore beckons. It is time to depart the proverbial stand of icy treats, to reel back to distant 1983, marked by adolescent trials and tribulations.

It's around 1983, and I'm in the midst of my awkward teenage years, complete with acne and a face dotted with Clearasil. I sit in Mr. Mantyka's physics class, trying to hide my intelligence behind a façade of wit and humour. Though I'm from a poorer neighbourhood, my wits always give me an edge. My jokes amuse my peers, though at this moment, I remain quiet.

I'm kind of smart. But I don't apply myself except for in the cutting comedy quip realm.

The class laughs.

I didn't say anything.

I pop a zit.

I look around and notice the kids from wealthier families in their designer outfits. They think they're better, but I have my own brand of creativity. I take out a Bic pen and sketch a penguin on my discount store shirt – my version of their designer logos.

I'm lying on the floor of our living room. The ironing board is above me. My mum is above me ironing everything in the house, including the cat—a task she does once every week. I don't have trust issues, or I wouldn't be lying under the board.

Our TV is playing The Bay City Rollers. My older brother we shall call Uncle Brian, because that's his name wants to pick the other channel, we had two.

Brian is eager to watch Lawrence Welk because Bobby & Sissy are featured.

296

Should we introduce a gay character into the narrative at this point?"

For what purpose?

To attract a broader audience.

That's pandering!

Yet the conversation shifts as Brian flips the channel. Given my recent growth spurt, I've gained a bit of strength over Brian and, quite rudely, I insist on having things my way – we carry on watching the Bay City Rollers.

When Dad arrives home, his mood is foul. He's hungry for dinner and seems to regard me as nothing more than a costly annoyance.

Did he actually say that?

No, but the sentiment was clear.

297

Perhaps that's why he made a point of giving you a Frisbee once a year on a day that wasn't even your birthday, but rather a day of his choosing – as your birthday.

It's not like all kids get frisbees.

\$1.49. Says it all.

Anyway, I've started drawing penguins on my shirts to fend off bullies.

Dad demands his dinner and wanting to watch Walter Cronkite. Which is better than he watches Stampe Wrestling and eats sardines. When he commands, the TV set crackles with static, and I find myself stationed at the rabbit ears, adjusting them to keep the picture on the screen clear. As we watch, a gruesome news story airs, prompting Dad to shout at the TV in disgust, “Not during dinner! Turn that crap off.” A dinner being eaten off of TV trays with mountain vistas.

Happily, I switch back to the Bay City Rollers.

Meanwhile, Mum continues with her chores, ostensibly ironing the cat.

Meow.

298

Nonsense, she never ironed cats.

How old is your kitty?

We had to get a new cat anyway; the previous one was overly smooth.

The conversation bounces around. Someone yearns for another popsicle – melty and tempting.

I could go for that. But first, let’s pop this zit.

Our dialogue continues, bobbing along much like the rapid flow of a river.

1 983

I was kissing a girl; her name, which I discovered weeks later, was Corrie. We immediately connected at a time when my father was nearing the end of his life, and I was desperate for an escape from the sadness engulfing me.

Corrie's parents, George, and Peggy, were warm, loving, and outgoing.

They opened their home and hearts to me, a testament to their amazing, loving nature. They seemed to see something in me, recognizing a strength in my character as I dated their daughter.

299

Corrie was surrounded by a delightful circle of friends with whom I naturally fit in.

Her adoptive brother Wes (Corrie also adopted) had his own close-knit group, including the kind-hearted Jeffbo – a gentle giant – and the more reserved Kirk, often lost in thought, as well as a charming clique that Wes seemed to charm effortlessly.

My recollection of when Wes and I first met is hazy. For Corrie, Wes could be a thorn in her side, embodying the free spirit that often led him to flirt with danger, much to George and Peggy's chagrin.

Most times, Wes was the life of the party.

Consequences?

300

He barely acknowledged them. When the time came, our connection was undeniable.

How can I be so sure?

Because he's still a prominent figure in my memories to this day.

1 985
My father passed away. The Raddysh family became my solace, holding me together during that tumultuous time. 301

1 987

My beloved Siamese cat, Guy, died.

The relationship with Corrie ended, and our attempt at friendship was beginning to fail, which was leading down a path to harsh words.

Then, tragedy struck again; my mother died. I was a wreck.

Facing the loss of my own family, I was terrified of losing my chosen family as well—the Raddysh's—especially as mine and Corrie's relationship had crumbled.

In a twist of fate that turned our lives upside down, Corrie, selfishly, suffered a brain aneurysm. Her sudden health crisis put everything into perspective, and miraculously, I managed to maintain my bond with my chosen family. And Vern.

302

After my mother's death, Wes needed a change. So, he moved into my basement, where we converted a huge armoire into the entrance of his make-shift room. It was our running joke whenever guests dropped by – trying to guess where Wes lived. He hadn't come out; he just happened to live in a closet.

Ironically, it's surreal when you think about it.

Wes had a waterbed.

Relevance?

How old is your dog?

But it's a damp cold.

What?

One day, you'll understand.

February 14, 1990, Wes had moved to Vancouver, and I decided to join him there.

As I'm moving to Vancouver to live with Wes. I'm greeted by a snowstorm. 200 cars in the ditch. I'm okay, I'm from Saskatchewan, I can drive in the snow.

What a stupid thing people from winter climes think when they want to insult drivers where it rarely snows, as if they know what driving uphill in winter is like. Saskatchewan has precisely four hills, you are not an expert winter driver if you can drive on snow in a mall parking lot. But I digress.

304

I arrive at Wes's work. He gets me drunk. We are going to be staying at someone named Carla's until we find our own pad.

I see The Simpson's for the first time.

July 1990

Wes, Greg – a man of short stature-short – and I took a leap of faith and bought a hotel in Negril, Jamaica, armed with nothing but our words.

To celebrate we rent motorcycles. I've never ridden one before. I'm only wearing nothing (short-shorts), flip flops, and a baseball hat. I look silly in baseball hats, if I didn't, I'd likely be in the majors. Did I tell you I was a City, Provincial, and All-Star second basemen in sandlot ball?

I crashed the motorbike. Sliding on my side with the bike between my legs for fifty yards. My skin, hat and flip flops didn't protect me.

It fucking hurt a lot.

Dr. Babs slathered me in purple stuff and taped my dangling toe back to my foot, and began chanting, what I made out to be a prayer.

I hallucinated.

Was this foreshadowing for Wes eventually losing a leg?
Probably not.

The moral of this stream:

If there's a lesson in this wild tale, it's that life is unpredictable and every moment, no matter how bizarre, is a stitch in the fabric of our stories.

You might wonder about your place in the world: Imagine finding yourself living in a simple shotgun shack.
Or waking up on the other side of the globe.

Perhaps you're driving a large, luxurious automobile.

Or nestled in a beautiful home, with a loving partner by your side.

It could even strike you to question Wes's qualifications as a Ferry Captain. And then you ponder, "How did I end up here?"

You might find yourself at a Talking Heads concert.

Talking who?

Let me explain. Unbeknownst to you, in a distant realm where animals were charged with consuming humans to protect the Earth, Wes was chosen to captain the Flying Ark that united the Animal Kingdom in a place called Foodville.

307

I might've mentioned that already, but if my grammar software excises it, how will you ever find out?

Despite my narrative wandering (call it laziness if you wish), many believed Corrie and I were destined to marry. But here I am, forty years on, still chronicling Wes's story. It seems you noticed Corrie's name in the mix, right?

308

Indeed, I'm thrilled to share that Vern and Corrie are living their own fairytale happily-ever-after!

As for me, I've outgrown my need for a cardiologist.
That's a positive development.

After affirming my fitness despite a resting heart of 36 beats per minute, my doctor jokingly called my heart "somewhat indolent."

Does this storytelling style appeal to you?
Is this what qualifies as prose?
Opinions vary widely.

Dr. Lee predicts I might need a pacemaker in thirty years - that is, if I can even count that high! I can only count to twenty.

310

But that might be irrelevant if the animals commence their feast; a panda is already fiddling with the antennas.

With such uncertainty, can humanity count on another thirty years?

It's 2023, and I first met Wes back in 1983 – do the math. This detail is important to our story, which I'll make sure to clarify should it be missing in earlier sections.

Does this belong in this story?

Yes, because as you may have read if I included it previously in this tale, if I didn't, I'll go back and add it. Again, how will you ever know?

Wes suffered a catastrophic accident in 2022 solidifying his importance.

While riding a motor scooter that year, an 80-year-old man crashed into him, resulting in Wes losing a leg. He was on his way to an interview for his dream job: Ferry Captain.

311

Despite his own hardships, Wes reached out to help when he learned that J and I were on the brink of homelessness, sending us money without any questions or expectations.

His kindness during times of personal strife exemplified what it means to be an unconditional friend.

I'm moved to tears, inspired by Wes's generosity and resilience.

It compels me to have an open conversation with my doctor, reinforcing my purpose to make a difference – reminding me to persevere like Wes did. 312

My thoughts are like a stream of consciousness, breaking free and escaping into the wild.
Why isn't J home yet. I need to hug J.

Stream of conscious.

These 2137 words just blew the popsicle stand. 2145. 2146 2147.

When I woke up today, I was speaking aloud. My words spilled forth in a nonsensical torrent. I questioned the relevance of them to the story. My initial thought was "No" they do not belong.

313

Would you like to know what I said?

Fkukister, bleaky, chopple, rapple, stipple, that's' a word, crangy, jooups. Sap. Sap.

Or something like that.

I was going to say, "NO."

Over here.

.....

Kale

314

Stringent.

315

What's Failing Society?

316

#1 (t)

317

Mirrors

#1_(t)

**The belief
you made
better choices.**

318

What's #2? Rhetorical

319

I'VE FAILED MY FAMILY
WHY DO WE KEEP TRYING?
THE DECK IS STACKED
WE'VE FALLEN BELOW THE SURFACE
I'M TRAPPED INSIDE A MIRROR
ICE HAS FORMED ABOVE ME
I CAN'T BREAK THROUGH THE SURFACE
I CAN'T BREATHE
MY BIRTH MOTHER WAS RIGHT
I'M NOT MUCH
I NEVER WILL BE
I WILL DIE A FAILURE
TOO DARK?
HOW OLD IS YOUR CHIHUAHUA?

320



MY DYING FRIEND DEAN ON READING

The first time I faced the temptation of pulling a trigger, I was only five years old.

On December 14th, just one day after my cardiologist terminated our doctor-patient relationship, I contemplated if I should reach out to him. How is he coping without having me as a patient?

I decided to leave him be for now.

Anxiety grips me with a premonition that tomorrow, my partner J and I will face a dire situation likened to falling through ice: trapped under a freezing surface, clawing desperately against the crystal barrier that cruelly mirrors our desperation as we suffocate, our financial lifeline severed.

322

Frantically, we claw at the ice. I must remind myself that I am not a failure; life has simply dealt me a challenging hand.

On the surface, old friends and acquaintances seem oblivious to our struggle, instead offering us hollow inspiration through memes.

Is their intention genuine, or do they not understand the gravity of our century's worth of combined life experience?

The absurdity of their actions begs a question with no rational answer.

Despite the absence of a cardiologist, I've never felt so unwell.

As I happened upon the P-Man on the street, I instinctively held back, put off by his characteristic toxicity and brusque demeanor. He proceeded to inform me about his acquaintance, Mr. M, a man who is seventy years old. The P-Man frequently shares updates about Mr. M's doings. In the past, I might have referred to Mr. M in a different light, but today I find myself edging towards addressing him by his true identity. I harbour no fondness for Mr. M—with his toxic and racist views, he's the last person I'd wish to associate with. One of the last.

While the P-Man continued, he conveyed that Mr. M was feeling under the weather, and the details he shared seemed quite concerning. I suggested to the P-Man that Mr. M ought to consult a doctor.

Revealing compassion, the P-Man offered to take him to the hospital. However, Mr. M adamantly refused, stating his contempt for the drug addicts he believed to be crowding the emergency room at St. Paul's Hospital—his prejudice laid bare.

323

I pointed out that the medical staff who would attend to Mr. M, are certainly not addicts, and that those Mr. M, disparagingly labels 'druggies' would have no role in his care.

The term 'druggies' used to denigrate those who are struggling sits ill with me; it smacks of indolence and harsh judgment.

Frustrated by the P-Man's lingering and Mr. M's implied bigotry, I imaginatively push the former into traffic out of exasperation.

Enthroned upon the plush cushions of a sumptuous sofa, I find sanctuary on the second-story perch of the Hyatt hotel. Thankfully, and quite appropriately, my body does not betray a hint of frivolous arousal. Instead, my focus is ensnared by the literary leviathan clutched in my hands – “The Year of the Locust,” Terry Hayes’ odyssey into the chasms of espionage, factions of terror, and the dusty whispers of the Middle East. A tome boasting 789 pages that stretches its intricate narrative across continents and conspiracies, it’s a daunting textual beast that has somehow managed to ensnare my psyche within its paper jaws, its author’s spectral fingers clutching at me, inexorably pulling me into its depths. My thirst for its words is insatiable.

Amid the novel’s grip, a solitary thought pirouettes through my mind. It’s of Dean, a companion teetering on life’s precipice – truth be told, we’ve shared our journey for a mere eighteen months. Our friendship is an education in the bittersweet ephemeral; no ornate platitude or internet-born proverb can brace one for the camaraderie of a soul gradually cascading into oblivion.

For Dean – brave, crumbling Dean – is imprisoned by a relentless degenerative affliction that devours his very essence. Each day, it pilfers a fragment: a step, a word, a sliver of hope.

A page turns, whispering into the quiet. The book holds me tight, yet a thought escapes its grasp and flutters again: Does Dean seek refuge in stories, like I do?

I resolve to inquire, just as a missive from him lights up the screen. The invitation is simple – beer and companionship. There are days when the murky fog of my own despondency would urge me to decline.

But the gravity of Dean’s mortality weighs upon my conscience, my inner battle with depression paling in comparison. We convene in the mundane sanctuary of our locale.

We embrace. I’m greeted not only by Dean’s enduring affection but by his proclamation of love for us – myself and the Mayor, our next-stool-over compatriot.

Within that confession, Dean drops another – a proposition of 10 sojourns through the maelstrom of shock therapy at UBC. But the trek, a mere 45 minutes (each way), seems an odyssey he’d rather not embark on. He admits, with harrowing tranquility, acceptance of an impending ‘final’ journey – into the shadow realm.

In the face of mortality, my usual silent sentinel retreats, allowing a question to escape – does he immerse himself in the pages of books?

“No,” he confides; the act of reading now a source of an inexplicable anxiety.

IF YOU KNEW YOU WERE DYING
WOULD YOU KEEP READING?

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IF YOU KNEW YOU WERE DYING
WOULD YOU PLANT A GARDEN IN SPRING?

327

My mind wanders, and I can't help but pry further – do the dying race against time? Do they hunger to devour all of creation's offerings before the curtain falls?

It's an intrusive probe, jagged and raw.

Yet, Dean, with heartbreaking grace, offers gratitude for our recognition of his enduring existence amidst the hush of his decline.

A delicate query arises concerning the potential miracle of his treatment, and with resilience, he affirms its promise.

So, I declare our selfish plea, wrapped in jest – rejection of the gentle beckon of the beyond, an advocacy for a life prolonged by electric salvation. For his absence would cast a shadow upon us all.

As if anointed by his pending departure, Dean bequeaths unto me his plate of French fries and orders up a feast of chicken wings.

The absurdity of our reality prompts a jest about the setting of his treatment – are we to expect cobblestone and chains?

He echoes once more his surrender to the fickle fates.

My offer is one of light-hearted camaraderie; a comical vehicle of deliverance. A bicycle built for two – will it be the whimsy of a banana seat or the daring of handlebar perches?

886 words poured from the tapestry of my mind – woven and laid bare here for scrutiny.

MORE CBC

Hello CBC Books,

My name is Lindsay Wincherauk; I'm a 63.5-year-old Vancouver author who, as I age, is now counting in fractions. In the past year, I've written 16 manuscripts which I pitch, get rejected, get rejected, get rejected, shower, rinse, repeat.

On day one of the pandemic, the company I dedicated 15 years of my life to, used the pandemic to replace me with someone younger (cheaper).

My family and I are about to become homeless in 2024, despite my application for over 280 jobs. That really sucks. Both having to apply for jobs and becoming homeless. Needless to say, . . .

Why do people say, 'needless to say' and then . . . ?

A bit about me, the following is down below, but I think this is a good place to add it as well.

... ..

Who is Lindsay Wincherauk

Lindsay entered this world in a place where unwed mothers were ostracized, their 'bastard' offspring swiftly torn away, only to be trafficked into adoption, all in the name of rectifying their 'error' and protecting the façade of family and church.

330

... ..

Anyway, why am I writing you?
I think I would make an excellent guest or host or something with CBC books. Publishers send me stacks of books. I was going to say whacks, but stacks make more sense to share my thoughts on because they like the organizational capacity of my mind.

Here's a recent example of a publisher's request to send me books:

... ..

I'm reaching out today to see if you'd be interested in any of our Winter/Spring 2024 titles for review. We've loved collaborating with you in the past, so please let us know if there are any titles, you'd like us to send you, or if you have any questions!

331

... ..

To which I replied with a list.

... ..

But to highlight how they like my mind and free work:

Hazel mentioned to me that we usually send you our entire catalogue! Would this be alright with you?

... ..

See, they appreciate my thoughts.

I've read over 300 books in the last few years. If you Google me, you will see many authors use my thoughts on their Websites, and the Winnipeg Free Press mentions me in an author interview.

... ..

You may read my book thoughts here:

<https://www.lindsaywincherauk.com/i-love-it-2023.html>

332

... ..

And you can learn more about me here:

www.lindsaywincherauk.com

... ..

I've also attached a working copy of "Lindsay Musings: Volume 1."

I hope you read it, it examines what it is like to be in your sixties and fearing homelessness.

I don't want to become homeless.

Thanks for taking the time to read this.

Warm Regards,

Lindsay Wincherauk

333

P.S. For the last three years I was asked to participate in "The Read for the Cure."

How can I become homeless?

... ..

PRIVILEGE ?

334

Sarah

335

Sarah shimmered as an unforeseen supernova in the wheat-gold skies of Saskatchewan when the Star Phoenix proclaimed her amongst the province's top ten sirens.

Perhaps the twinkling destiny of her accolades lent me the courage to wander through Saskatoon's embracing streets on the milestone of my twentieth year, harbouring the sweet ambition of stealing a kiss—more than the tender graze upon my cheek that fate allowed.

336

In the weave of destiny, Sarah and I were threads of kindred texture. I, too, was a recipient of curious fame—with a title only a shade less storied than hers—garnering second place for the most acclaimed posterior among my gridiron brethren at the University of Saskatchewan, my glutes having captivated an enclave of admirers with discerning taste.

Twilight reminiscences paint a surreal canvas of the time my cleats tread the turf for the Edmonton Wildcats, and fate sent us spinning in Lloydminster, straddling the split-heart of a city shared by Saskatchewan and Alberta. Our bus, cradling dreams and ambitions, danced too close with calamity. In a cosmic jest, the testimony of a silent jury of freshly sheared llamas became the linchpin of innocence for our bewildered driver.

Journeys of youth carried eccentric vignettes, like the day Tony G and I were held captive at an Alberta intersection, not by bandits or barricades, but by the mischievous slip of a Corvette's key into the concrete unknown.

337

What?

We accidentally locked the keys in the car while it was running in the middle of an intersection.

The snap hits my hands, and I instantly drop back, my cleats digging into the turf five yards deep in our end zone. To my left, Gord B sprints up the sideline, a blur of speed reminiscent of a champion racer.

With a surge of adrenaline, I heave a spiraling rocket into the air, releasing it the split second before the opponent's linemen crash down at my feet in a futile dive.

Gord's under the soaring ball in full stride, snatching it out of the sky on our fifty-yard line – a seventy-yard strike that cuts through the tension of the game like a knife.

With the grace of a gazelle, he bolts the remaining distance, breaking away to the end zone, completing what would become a legendary play in Canadian football.

338

Later, as I pore over a photograph of that pivotal moment, I can't help but chuckle. Directly behind the end zone, two people are locked in a casual game of tennis, utterly oblivious to the epic feat unfolding mere yards away.

A closer look reveals something less amusing: one of my blockers, in a less-than-legal move, is taking out an opponent's legs. That could have flattened our triumph had the referee's gaze been sharper. In the aftermath, I'm left to reflect on the curious fortunes born from the fine line between skill and chance – and the pivotal role that luck and oversight have played in the annals of sport.

I must thank the referees for their lack of competency.

I would have easily beaten the tennis players – at tennis.

After our victorious game, Gord, another teammate, and I plunged into the pulsing heart of Edmonton's downtown to savour our epic accomplishment. When Gord hopped out of my car, the spiralling rocket landed a second time.

At the witching hour of 1 AM, we found my car imprisoned by chains in a desolate parking complex, demanding a daring escape.

Then, in a turn of events that bordered on the absurd, we blundered into a deserted 7-Eleven – not a soul in sight except us, as my teammate turned bandit and hurled a cascade of sugary spoils through the door. He became a veritable sugar outlaw for the night.

But our caper didn't end there. In a twist of irreverence, we descended upon one of the city's exclusive golf courses. There, under the conceit of moonlight, we 'liberated' the flagsticks, distributing them like trophies at our team's training grounds.

339

Reflecting on that night's escapades, it's clear that our judgment of suitable celebrations was revoltingly skewed. The harsh truth that shadowed our spree was the glaring reality that we avoided trouble simply because we were white. The authorities turned a blind eye, winking at our shenanigans.

I hate to admit the privilege that shielded us – it's no joke, and yet, uncomfortably, it seems to be the case.

Gord B went on to play for the Edmonton Eskimos.

What destination could possibly be etched in the stars for us?

Sarah pondered aloud, her voice echoing with a mix of wanderlust and curiosity. She reclined in her seat, her eyes dancing over a list of top ten peculiarities, none stranger than the mystical Dali llamas, not to be confused with their tranquil namesakes.

340

On our whimsical journey, my own *derrière* – dubbed cheekily as ‘#2’ – was upstaged only by the fleeting glamour of our arrival.

We pulled into Regina, Saskatchewan with as much fanfare as a circus train might.

As I awkwardly maneuvered down the confined bus steps, I was unexpectedly greeted by a motley crew of Regina's most eccentric locals. This peculiar welcome wagon was a stark contrast to the austere halls of academia where I lingered in the shadow of Timmy L – the notorious 'sparrow.'

He had a penchant for rattling the silver-haired custodians of knowledge by secretively snatching up disoriented sparrows that collided with reflective windows. His bizarre act of releasing them from his mouth never failed to elicit gasps and hand-wringing, a spectacle only he could relish.

341

Despite my curious claim to fame, life on the Wildcats elevated me from a 'behind-the-scenes' player to the pinnacle of posterior prestige. It was a superficial accolade, yet it set me apart, stirring a mix of pride and embarrassment within me.

In a moment of heartfelt impulse beneath the vast Saskatchewan sky, I turned toward Sarah and pressed a gentle kiss upon her cheek – my silent ode to our shared journey into the unknown.

What curious paths these memories tread?
Sarah, once queen of lists, now whispers reverence to
the solemn guardians of fine art on Canada's rugged
western shores.

And our own fairy tale?

342

A subtle dance of almost and never, poised on the precipice of
'might-have-been', but Sarah and I never waltzed down the aisle
of forever-togethers.

A delusional dream I almost never had.

Patti

343

In 1979, for a fleeting few hours, Patti M and I became an improbable pair. Her father, Jackie, revered as local royalty, steered the Blades, our town's cherished junior hockey team, to glory. Had the tracks not defined our town, Patti and I might have soared to the pinnacle of Saskatoon's social elite, subjects of whispers and envy. But fate, as if mocking our brief union, sent a stalled train between us, a steel behemoth that cut short my journey across the divide.

344

Pam

345

Pamela R., daughter of a hospitality magnate, dwelled in a house that was an echo of grandeur, reminiscent of the opulent Grand Budapest Hotel – nestled on the outskirts of Saskatoon.

Their home boasted an indoor pool that rivaled those in any of her father's luxurious establishments. It was almost tradition; a coterie of us – dubbed 'commoners' – were summoned to partake in the elegance of her private grotto, cloaked in disposable swimwear that she provided. Her father's six car garage filled with resting Rolls, Ferraris, and Bentleys

Meanwhile, the incessant clanging of tools against metal sang the soundtrack to train mechanics toiling away. I stood there, pondering – if not for the insurmountable tracks before me, perhaps I'd be helming my own empire of four-star havens.

Once, in the throes of youth, I found myself as Pamela's passenger, absurdly naked (but not) beside her, tearing across the distance to Edmonton in her jeep. We shared a room, a night opaque in memory, our lips may or may not have brushed in the muted darkness – we never entertained the conversation.

Hailing from the less glamorous side of the tracks, where financial instability is intrinsic, Pamela – only she had the privilege of unbridled candour from me – advanced me the funds to purchase a car for a job that would soon become my bane.

Inevitably, I faltered, buckled under debts I couldn't repay.

By the time Pamela (now living in Vancouver) and her love-struck shadow Jeffbo (living in Saskatoon) visited Vancouver – where I, too, was a mere drifting presence – I had regressed to a boy of shrouded pride, skirting their every move.

Her father, wielding his billionaire's insight, confronted me at the Four Seasons Hotel. There, amongst the emblems of success that I could not claim, I confessed my financial ruin. A less than proud moment – if I were to be tormented by regret – this would certainly rank high on my list.

347

Dismissively, he marked me off as a write-off, a misfit unworthy of his daughter's future.

Last I heard, Pamela was flourishing.

Unlike me, she had always been one to keep her head gracefully above the waves.

I know this is decades to late and lacking meaning: I'm sorry.

Susan

348

When I ventured into ninth grade, Sue reigned supreme as a junior or possibly a senior. The lure of the track team wasn't the promise of glory or the sprint toward medals – it was the sight of Susan, resplendent in her track shorts.

I'd bet my last dollar. . .

You've hit last dollar an absurd number of times.

...every hormone-driven adolescent male on our team was coaxed into running circles, quite literally, by that very view.

Sue and I might have spun a teenage romance; only fate intervened in the form of a mischievous penguin doodle on my shirt – crafted not in thread, but in betraying ink.

349

Sue, as fate would have it, went on to etch a success story in the annals of journalism – her name synonymous with some of Canada's most esteemed television narratives.

And through it all, I suspect she remembers me as vividly as a dreamer recalls the wisp of a forgotten midsummer's dream.

Translation = I'm sure Sue had no idea who I was.

I used to run swiftly.

Jay

350

Jay and I are friends on the enigmatic realm of Facebook. Back in high school, he was the kind of rock star that made hearts throb, the lead in a New Order cover band – unless time has tangled my memories into fiction.

But those humble beginnings blossomed; his band evolved, shedding covers for originality, and reemerged as the Northern Pikes.

They tasted the sweet tang of success.

Our connection has endured the years, albeit digitally. I doubt Jay knows who I am – hell, I don't really know who I am?

I shoot a message into the void: "Hey, Jay?"

The screen lights up with his response: "Hey, Lindsay... Wait. Who are you?"

A chuckle escapes me as I type back, "Your forgotten comrade from the Facebook trenches?"

His single-word reply, hangs in the virtual air: "Huh."

Don

352

Huddled on the chilled floor of the Teed family's living room, the nostalgic scent of childhood mischief seemed to hang in the air like our breath in the frigid outdoors. There, one of my best friends Chris T—the linchpin of our youthful escapades.

Each winter, his father masterfully crafted a backyard hockey rink, a frozen stage where the likes of us braved the icy breath of -30 Celsius to chase the gleam of a hockey puck in endless games of shinny.

Amidst our motley crew was Jim E, whose relationship with the truth was, at best, entirely theoretical. To him, honesty was a road less travelled, a path cloaked in the shroud of mystery.

353

On a day as biting as the frost itself, Chris's cousin, Hugh from Fort Qu'Appelle, found his way to our rink. There he was a giant of a boy with feet bare and shirtless, against the cold—an unthinkable act of rebellion against the season's tyranny.

Though big-boned and with a puck that stubbornly refused an aerial dance, Hugh's humour soared. Posing a wry comparison of King Kong to their grandmother, he had us in stitches, our youth-fuelled laughter echoing through the crystalline air.

Later, congregating in the warmth of the Teeds' sanctuary, we were a gathering of familiar faces: Mark T, the elder brother, and his confidant, Don L of U of S volleyball fame – or so the legend I might've fabricated claims.

The T patriarch inquired about Don's aging grandfather, eliciting from Mrs. T a response replete with eyebrow-raising wit – a quip involving her delicate hop over his misplaced 'giant phallus' on the sidewalk, a punchline of such absurdity it brought the room to a roaring laughter, its nonsensical charm amplified coming from the matriarch herself.

As fate would have it, Don L's future sparkled with the promise of riches – a mere letter swap from 'millionaire' to 'billionaire' might just encapsulate his trajectory, as he rose to the heights of a company rhyming with Francisco.

Oh, the liberties of creative narration!

Meanwhile, the silent sentinels of the rail, those god-like mechanics, indulged in their extended reprieve. Far removed from our youthful revelry, they bore witness to the intricate machinery of life idling quietly in the background.

Mike

355

Back in our university days, Mike and I shared more than just books and banter – sports were our battleground. He dominated the ice with a hockey stick in hand, while I ruled the turf, a football perpetually under my arm. I might have outshone him in our sporting choices, but destiny had grander plans for Mike.

It wasn't long before he was etching his name into history, leading his team to hoist the Stanley Cup high as a renowned champion coach.

As for me?

I channeled my passion into founding a community touch football team – nothing glamorous, but every victory was a triumph of the heart.

356

Despite the chasm fame drove between us, I held onto the camaraderie of our college years, gifting him an eternal invitation to my games. *I never did this. My games were at public parks.*

A gesture of friendship, perhaps futile, for the echo of absent cheers spoke volumes – Mike never once graced the sidelines. Meanwhile, my mailbox stood empty, void of the thrill a ticket to his sold-out games would carry whenever his team skated onto Vancouver ice. Our paths diverged, not in the woods, but on the fields of our chosen games, underlining a bittersweet truth of forgotten promises and lost connections.

Gwen

357

Our love was a sprint, hearts racing in sync. She, a Canadian champion hurdler, her muscles springing to life over every obstacle.

Me, always a step behind, endlessly scaling the stairs in the stadium with the dreamer's futile pace. Marriage, the finish line we never reached.

Now she strides onto new tracks, while I find my legs are giving way. The urge to chase her story fades; I can't muster the will to search it out.

My life has been brushed by souls flickering in and out. They've etched memories and left trails of influence that weave through my existence with the complexity of a tapestry's threads.

Here I am, still trapped on the wrong side of destiny, clasped in love's embrace but perpetually shadowed by a spectral presence. A ghost, born from the depths of a so-called demon seed, claiming its stronghold within the convoluted folds of misunderstood faith.

359

This entity that hovers, indifferent to my intellect which could very well match or exceed those I've mentioned before, ensnares me still. The stark reality of one's birthplace can shackle a life with a unique set of distortions – mental, economic, and social. It's a persistent echo, shaping every step I take.

360

Now, entrenched in the legacy of train mechanics spanning four generations, I ponder if perhaps I should just seize the wrench and repair the locomotive myself. 361

The past lingers close. Doug K. and I, weaving tales of adolescence through poker games every Friday or Saturday night, imprinted in my years from ten to fifteen.

'Freebie and the Bean' flickered before us twelve times, our youthful eyes wide, in a movie theatre.

We dined like lords amidst the dimly lit elegance of Hanover's, sheltered by the foundation of a hotel owned by Pam's father, whom I had yet to meet.

There we were, just children of thirteen, savouring the forbidden sweetness of cherries jubilee.

Unperturbed by the shadow of danger, we embarked on public journeys downtown, oblivious to the dark whispers of [REDACTED] (his name is not worthy of mention) monstrous deeds, his grim shadow looming just a block away from our innocent trails.

Twice I've watched my mother succumb to death's insidious grip.

And if you dare whisper that I should move on, first question how a soul so deeply scarred might navigate the journey of letting go.

363

 victims:

Dahryne Cranfield, Robert Grubestic,
Samantha Turner, and Cathy Scott.

364

Overtime

365

I want to make it unambiguously clear my words are not intended to undermine or belittle the remarkable achievements of the individuals I've chronicled thus far in my narrative. During our ephemeral exchanges, I have perceived nothing but their profound kindness, their innate empathy, their unyielding tenacity, and their extraordinary potential—a potential that inevitably tips the scales toward benevolence.

It is my fervent hope the tone of my writing has not been misconstrued as embittered, cynically detached, or world-weary—an impression I have painstakingly endeavored to avoid.

Yet as I navigate through the intricacies and convoluted byways that constitute life's journey, I find myself ensnared time and again by the recognition privilege often skews the landscape of our struggles, presenting a contrasting silhouette of challenges and adversities.

And should one find themselves the beneficiary of destiny's favour, cradled within a realm where obstacles are but gossamer veils easily brushed aside, it becomes a moral imperative—for them, for us, for whomever it may concern—to muster the humility to concede our own fortuity is a rarity.

We must extend this cognizance even further, accepting the vast majority treads a path fraught with sterner locks and heavier gates.

Perhaps, the most insidious aspect of privilege – the very curse it carries – is the seductive and erroneous conviction that one’s initial leap forward was ever a warranted testament to personal merit.

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**UNFORTUNATELY, TWO DAYS AFTER
THE AUTHOR'S CARDIOLOGIST
DUMPED HIM, THE AUTHOR DIED OF A
MASSIVE HEART ATTACK.**

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IRONICALLY, HIS CARDIOLOGIST WAS REALLY A DERMATOLOGIST AND ON THE SAME DAY THE AUTHOR DIED OF A MASSIVE HEART ATTACK, HIS CARIOLOGIST POPPED A PIMPLE AND HE TOO, DIED OF A MASSIVE HEART ATTACK.

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COINCIDENTLY.	IS THAT IRONY?	370
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HOW WAS YOUR FLIGHT?



371

My journey commenced with the banality one faces in Brussels, the nexus of incessant flight connections, an airport where every wayfarer's path inevitably crosses.

In the security queue, *the security agent spoke 39 languages*, a procession of personal effects paraded before us, culminating in mine, unremarkably perched upon the conveyor belt.

The gentleman ahead, introduced informally as Larry by virtue of his chatter, was no ordinary traveller. His life's novelties included a sibling named Harry, poised to wed in the enigmatic reaches of Etobicoke within the span of a mere five days and bizarrely, an anonymous best man candidacy.

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Yet, the marvel of the moment was not Larry's familial ties but the arcane contents of his luggage - an assembly that featured a chainsaw, an absurd collection of erotica, and whimsically, the long-lost Amelia Earhart, and a Manneken Pis corkscrew.

The quadfecta, however, was not considered complete without his trifling trove of personal lubricants—seized in an ironic act of airport authoritarianism.

My seat in the plane's central alcove found me squeezed between intriguing strangers. Renaldo, of Lithuanian fame, was a conversationalist barred by language, but not without the aid of Harold, his dedicated translator.

Thus, through Harold's linguistic bridge, I learned of Renaldo's glamorous calling as the premier 'Hand Model' of the 'Eastern Block' – a title I later deciphered as homage to a Vilnius nightspot renowned for more than its libations on Vilnius's West Side.

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To my alternate flank was Randy, entrusted with the sacred duty of a scribe, perennially capturing Renaldo's gesticulated escapades in graphite strokes.

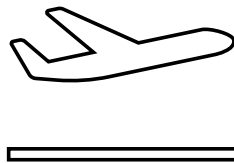
Midflight, our culinary experience arrived, a supposed delicacy of braised squirrel ensconced in a verdant nest of kale and quinoa – an affront to the palate.

My cinematic yearnings clashed with the realities of airport security. My desktop computer, an extension of my personal tech theology, had been denied passage. Let it be known, I harbour a disdain for laptops. Especially when flying to Phoenix, Arizona.

374

Miraculously, as our vessel cleaved through the Atlantic skies, a flamboyant display of phalangeal aesthetics by Renaldo set the cabin alight. An unexpected podium descended - a serendipitous stage supplanting the expectant oxygen masks - and therein, I witnessed passion arise, not just in Renaldo's performance, but stirring within me. I got a boner.

375



Fatigue settled as the show climaxed. My thoughts drifted to cinematic distractions, only to be jolted by the aircraft's abrupt suspension. Gazing out, I beheld a surreal cinema, a pantheon of airborne vehicles transfixed, as 'Turner & Hooch' unfurled on a celestial screen. Amid the dimming theatrical glow, Larry, now code-named Poindexter post-transformation, endeavoured to woo a sun-kissed vision in yellow, sitting in his row, with a dalliance doomed to be foiled by his humour's dismal charm.

376

The dance of convivial convicts gave way to the macabre - he usurped a bridal party role through an act of villainy. His amorous ambitions capsized in the incarcerating confines of the plane's brig—a life sentence of flirtatious blinking as his only solace.

Harold, ever the companion, ventured forth in quest of effervescent libations and the poppable satisfaction of corn.

Then, the world pivoted. We, the unwitting voyagers, were hurled into the maw of a skyward spiral, transported through time and space, only to descend into a paradoxical jungle of perpetual cascades – an echo of Niagara repeated three-thousandfold.

In this dimension, a floundering Britney Spears-laden vessel heralded a melodic doomsday, while a symposium of climate changemakers awaited within the sanctuary of ballroom grandeur. The late scientist James Lovelock was hosting the symposium a man who's birth and death share the same calendar date.

377

Gales of locusts danced amidst climatic frenzy as Republican politicians sculpted ice dwellings, a peculiar musing in the sweltering 211.987-degree aftermath.

The Grand Ballroom seated 3,500 guests. Among them, aside from 211 Republicans known for their conservative stances akin to igloo builders, the remaining 3,289 attendees were eerily identical representations of the Mona Lisa, each seated in a high chair. This sight unsettled James as he struggled to decipher the enigmatic gender of the replicated figures and the direction of their collective gaze.



The Republicans, seizing the moment, escalated the situation into a major political controversy. Meanwhile, outside, as snowflakes gently descended, the imagery seemed to serve as a metaphor for the broadening reach of the progressive values the Republicans had now weaponized into a point of political contention by co-opting and denigrating the term "woke."

In matrimonial spontaneity, Helen and I became entwined, plunging into the culinary simplicity of transparent broth in our newfound connubial bliss. 379

Upon the nuptial twilight, the ensemble ascended the stage—a gesture as delightful as it was unexpected. The Violet Femmes, an audacious Violent Femmes tribute band, took the limelight with a sole, grandiloquent offering: a 789-minute avant-garde fusion of Purple Rain and Add it Up.

Their Extended Play, a triptych of the same melody, stretched magnificently into thrice the length.

Shoulders undulated beneath the soft caress of the music's tide.

Amongst the eclectic mix of guests, Platinum Blonde was a vision, emblemizing the notes of Situation Critical that danced in the air.

A dog named Shannon was on a log drifting out to . . .

Tears, unbidden, cascaded down on Helen's gown—a tribute to the emotion the band's music wrung from the depths of my soul—and the death of a dog.

Charlie, a maestro of sorts in the dim underbelly of our world—awaiting on the plane, a fuselage he turned into his rogue empire—had his pockets sagging with contraband, literally, Charlie had drugs in his pockets, each substance a key to doors of perception he was all too eager to unlock.

Renaldo, meanwhile, stole away to the lavatory, a secret conclave with Emin... yet it was not Emin..., but Stan, a shadow and yet a revelation in the smoky recesses of the plane.

Mirror in the bathroom please talk free, the door is locked, just you and me.

Hello, Jan Arden.

What's Ricky Gervais doing here?

Three years hence, ensconced in a cataract's embrace, Helen, the sketcher once known as Randy, renamed anew, Harold, Renaldo, and I were drawn skyward by the irresistible allure of a vortex, bearing us aloft with furry tails and grainy husks. Iceland loomed beneath, and my volcanic expertise earned me the honour of commandeering our winged chariot.

The stewardess, all resembling cabbage patch dolls, presented poached eggs seasoned with kimchi, an unusual nourishment for the Britney Spears-infused retinue, who had somehow joined our ranks.

Yet what transpired next would defy all expectations.

Renaldo, gripping Harold, commanded the cabin's attention. A confession, delicate as lace and profound as the deepest seas, revealed the affections of his dexterous right hand.

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The irony was palpable as he distributed 'Bolt Upright™,' an ironic balm to the masculine worries of his audience.

Shielding my eyes from the theatrics, I succumbed to slumber.

When my consciousness returned, a Canadian metropolis welcomed our descent.

How was the traffic on the way to the airport?

How old's your dog?

••• •••

A text to my former employer this holiday season:

Hey Friends,

382

It has been a tough several years.

I wish you the best through the season. All we
have is each other.

Season's Greetings

••• •••

WHERE DO YOU LIVE?



383

Three years had passed since I last glimpsed Jeff Oliver – his name seems to cling to my memory like a neglected sticker on an old suitcase. He delivers parcels in his UPS uniform, weaving through the crowded canvas of our city.

We stumbled into each other early in 2020, the nascent whispers of COVID threading through frenzied media airwaves. In a moment brimming with old normalcy, we embraced – recklessly, defiantly – even as the world held its breath.

I didn't tangle with COVID until two years later.

And here I am, still...

... ALIVE! 297 vaccinations later.

384

I t's 2023 – the year that feels like a hesitant promise.

On a day painted with the crispness of mid-fall, I'm wandering down the sidewalk, threading through the fabric of the bustling day when – who would have thought? – Jeff crosses my path, a fleeting shadow against the concrete.

Our eyes dance a silent tango; quick, teasing winks exchanged.

He's still the messenger of other people's stories, these boxes and parcels, and there's this urge, mischievous and unbidden, to claim that our brief, illicit hug was the butterfly to my viral storm. It wasn't, but the thought twitches in my mind like an impish grin.

Farewell, Jeff.

The oracle of my pocket vibrates with life the next morning. It takes a curious nudge for me to recognize its metallic song – it's a phone.

The screen ignites with a cryptic demand:
ENTERPHONE.

"Hey Jeff, it's Lindsay," I say, still charmed by the oddness of the situation.

"Hey, Linds. Jeff here. I've got a package for you," his voice is a fingerprint, unmistakable amidst the white noise. I'm adrift in the city, so I tell him to leave it at the door – to leave a piece of the outside world on the threshold of my sanctuary.

"Sure thing. Oh, and Christine can start coaching soon," he tosses in, sparking riddles in the air.

Curiouser and curiouser.

I return to the nook that has cradled me for seven years – a home steeped in the tea of my life. A solitary box sits outside my door, like a question mark. Inside, my book lust rests unsated – I don't disturb the box's slumber.

When J steps through the threshold, curiosity wins. Tearing it open, we find a luxurious Coach bag—unanticipated, unclaimed, unsettling. Cryptic generosity? A lavish faux pas?

We suspend in that pocket of bewilderment for five days. Then, the building manager's text slices through the silence, inquiring about the possible delivery mishap. But our address—etched on the package as surely as our own history within these walls—belies their confusion. "The people in 709 thinks it may have been delivered to you by mistake." We dwell in an apartment that speaks in four digits, a numerical whisper devoid of sevens or nines.

My reply is a gentle prod at the absurdity: How does one wander through life not knowing where they lay their head?

387

I brave the digital tsunami of my inbox—over 31 emails, each one a siren's call professing a fortune waiting to be plucked. Scams, undoubtedly, their false promises tumbling like dominos.

How, indeed, does Christine navigate her own geography, her own story, with such bewilderment?

A snicker escapes me.

Suck it . . .

How does Chritine not know where she lives?

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THE MORE PHALLIC THE PORNOGRAPHY

THE MORE FLUID THE SEXUALITY?

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••• •••

ANIMAL LOVE: ONLY FOR THE WEALTHY



389

Jacob and David discovered love in the expansive, digital realms where souls meet in texts and avatars—far from the invasiveness of lascivious snapshots often punctuating online courtship. Dick pics.

A gossamer thread of communication had once bound them across cyberspace, yet fate ordained a silence until one serendipitous night. Jacob, buzzed with the effervescence of spirits and a longing that craved more than mere touch, stumbled upon David's digital footprint once more.

390

Six months—a mere blink in the cosmos—had done little to cool the simmering potential of their connection. They collided again in a dance of words, a ballet of the mundane which, to the casual observer, might appear banal, but to them, it highlighted the essence of their burgeoning bond.

Their inclination to meet sparked not an inferno but a heartening glow, a lantern in the darkness showing the way to something deeper.

When queried by a comrade about his nascent romance, Jacob could only muse to anticipate fireworks would be to yearn for the transient, while they, they were sculpting something lasting.

Upon their first meandering promenade, Jacob confided in David with a sincere gravity, **“My vow to you is this:** I shall wield my heart with such care it shall never wittingly be the cause of your pain. Should temptation beckon, its siren song will find no harbour in me. Our foundation will not be shaken by fears nor doubts. Should you find storm clouds gathering in your soul, seek solitude, let calm wash over you, and return to me – we have a love to cultivate.”

391

It was a covenant as unique as the souls it bound, a tacit understanding their intertwining lives would defy the mundane.

In the lull of time's passing, the affection between them grew with the deliberate grace of a snail, a testament to the notion that true connection—resilient, earnest—renders the thrill of the chase a pale shadow.

Mindful hearts, take note: their May-December love defied the chronicle of seasons—23 years apart, yet together they wove an arras of shared existence. As Jacob's career lent them a veneer of comfort, allowing them to treasure future dreams of laugh-filled diners and passport stamps, David grappled with the puzzle of his freshly-minted degree in a jigsaw world.

392

In their second year together, a colleague of Jacob's shared the irresistible images of a kitten rescued from the streets—the epitome of adorable.

Jacob's heart swayed as David repeatedly implored,
“Can we? Can we? Can we?”

They did, and so Hana, a bundle of whiskers and warmth, was welcomed into their lives. Jacob traveled a mere 30 kilometers, yet what a journey it was—to fetch Hana, so tiny she nestled comfortably in his palm. She gazed up at him on the way home, delicate mews escaping her, weaving threads of an unbreakable bond. Deeply.

Time etched forward, like a snail's measured tread, and their affection for their four-legged daughter flourished.

Once, Hana's malaise meant a vet visit, where the greeting wasn't a 'hello' but a flat “that'll be \$595.00.” Such is the costly comradeship with veterinary doors, comically expensive whether you're a pet owner or a passerby seeking the time.

Fortunate to afford it, Jacob and David would do anything—figuratively—for their precious Hana. Her spirits lifted swiftly; she returned to her routine of purring atop Jacob’s chest during his siestas.

As Jacob neared the steadfast milestone of 60, his company, lurking behind the murky veil of the pandemic, orchestrated his replacement with the cold efficiency of youth, seeking a less costly successor.

Yet, the callous calculus of corporate maneuvering could never quell the resilient swell of their love. With each adversity weathered, the roots of their bond only burrowed deeper into the fertile soil of their shared lives, transforming every challenge into the nourishment that strengthened their connection.

394

As the seasons waxed and waned, a relentless stress clung to Jacob like a spiteful shadow. It vaulted to vertiginous heights, as if trying to escape through the ceiling, where, in some cosmic jest, Lionel Richie serenaded the absurdity of it all. Side by side, Jacob and David bore witness to their life savings withering like autumn leaves in a fiscal frost, their investments crumbling like ancient ruins forgotten by time, and their credit swelling to a suffocating crescendo of maxed-out despair.

Luckily, Jacob was no amateur with words; a prolific writer, he now tells you this tale, using 'Jacob' as a nom de plume.

395

As financial woes loomed, and the threat of homelessness stalked them monthly, Jacob's resourcefulness led him to apply for every job available—even pushing dead bodies at a local hospital, though he never got a call back.

Jacob couldn't shake the ghostly suspicion his application had been quietly shuffled to the bottom of the pile, discarded in favour of fresher faces unblemished by the phantom of age.

In the ethereal theater of his imagination, he witnessed them contemplating the trajectory of his existence—a potential future wherein his vim and vigour could dwindle into a mere whisper, where he might find himself gliding silently through sombre corridors in a wheelchair, a spectral presence weaving through the vibrant thrum of youthful vitality. The very thought sent shivers down his spine, a phantasmagorical vision of an ethereal Jacob pressing on the spectral gears of the recently deceased Jacob, navigating the labyrinthine shadows of institutionalized care.

It was unsettling imagery, as unnatural as a burger stripped of its succulent meat, leaving behind a vacant, soulless bun.

Still, the proverbial snail inched on.
But is the snail a fitting emblem for such enduring affection?
Absolutely. Jacob will tell their story his way.

397

The moral inevitably surfaces: their love, resilient amidst life's tempests.

A gesture of kindness came – in the form of a \$260 grocery gift card from their friend Gary. 398
Bless his soul.

Previously, Jacob scorned those with pets in penury. Now, as poverty knocks, Jacob finds solace in Hana's embrace, her purr a balm to his weathered spirit. "Visit. Visit. Visit," he whispers, his troubles momentarily quelled.

Yet, as Hana developed a worrying lesion above her nose, their affection intensified in the hope it might spur healing – a vain hope.

Love couldn't mend the cut; nor could it pay for vet's fees. They felt they'd failed as Hana's guardians.

Desperation struck when Hana's condition worsened. No longer could they delay. At the vet, on the brink of financial defeat, Jacob pleaded against the absurd 'entrance fee.'

400

Luck, it seemed, was compassionate; the fee was waived, leaving them with a hope that Hana, now hindered from grooming by an (\$13.95) Elizabethan Collar, might be healed by their undying love in the face of hardship.

This narrative illustrates a stark, sorrowful reality – empathy, care, well-being, should not be luxuries gated by wealth, yet the world increasingly minds that principle.

Shouldn't all, regardless of stature, be able to nurture and be nurtured by our animal companions?

401

Jacob learned love knows no financial bounds, and love, as tenacious as a snail's pace, finds a way.

Mewl.

This tale traces back to Jacob and David's earlier years. Jacob, 23 years David's senior, never let their age difference define them. They were two souls in sync; age was merely a number.

David, fresh from university, sought his place in the world. Jacob, comfortably established in his career, conjured a life together – abundant, unworried, enriched by the promise of tomorrow. And so, with hearts brimming with hope, they embarked on a life journey with Hana, their cherished furry child – their love story inked, unending, on the pages of life.

402

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A Conundrum Not Worthy of An Answer Aloud

Hana, our cherished 12-year-old cat, lies listless in my lap, her once vibrant eyes now dim with sickness. I feel my heart constrict as **I consider the stark reality:** without a visit to the veterinarian, her fragile thread of life may soon snap.

A tear escapes, tracing a path down my cheek, a silent testament to the quiet that has replaced her comforting purrs.

Our financial stability crumbled when my job was abruptly stripped from me on the cusp of my sixtieth year, leaving me with no income and an inability to afford the care our beloved feline daughter so desperately needs.

What would you do?

Before you dare cast a shadow of judgment, let it penetrate your conscience that I've poured my desperation into over 280 job applications. This staggering quantity screams a bitter truth — my age is now an albatross hanging around the neck of my employability.

If your inclination is to stand in judgment, then you are a stranger to the core of my being, and I implore you to sever the illusion of camaraderie between us. We are estranged. Always have been. And frankly, the parting is a relief.

404

Should you find the audacity to presume you know better, to whisper unsolicited advice about the path I should tread, spare me your arrogance, and just leave. Or better yet, fuck off.

The dilemma looms before us, a monstrous decision clawing at my conscience. We could rush her to the veterinarian, an act of love that could grant her life's breath anew and allow her purrs to fill our space of despair.

Yet, that same act threatens to topple what little we have left, forking the path to a future where January 2024 marks the start of a grim existence without shelter, huddled on the unforgiving cold asphalt – a looming death-sentence, not just for me, but for Hana too.

She might survive only to endure a life devoid of warmth, her weakened purrs echoing against the chill of our grueling reality.

If we forgo the veterinarian, choosing instead to cradle Hana through her final days, we buy ourselves a brief respite, postponing the onset of homelessness to February 2024. But that decision comes shackled to the unbearable burden of witnessing Hana's light dim without fighting for a flame that could be rekindled. We are trading time for the soul-crushing silence that will envelop us, as I will be forced to attempt to fill the void left by her absence with hollow echoes of her memory.

405

What would you do?

The tears begin anew, unrestrained, as I grapple with this cruel crossroads where the heart and the harshness of our reality collide.

Should the privilege of pet companionship be reserved solely for those with wealth?

... ..



Dr. Sanjay Vociferous' Office – May 19, 2022

Receptionist: Hello, it's great to see you. Dr. Sanjay is ready to see you now!

Dr. Sanjay Vociferous (SV): Hello, hello. Do we have an appointment today? No matter. I'll always make time for you.

Timothy's Mum (TM): Thank you, Dr. S. We didn't schedule an appointment. We have some exciting news to share with you.

Timothy's Dad (TD): It's truly exciting.

SV: Come on, out with it. I'm on tenterhooks here. The suspense is —

TD & TM (together): Sanj, we've decided —

TD: Darling, you go ahead. I know you can't wait to tell him.

TM: Sanj, this isn't easy because we're going to miss you. You're always welcome at our place, and Tim's dad will still join you for weekly golf. But, dear friend, it's time for us to say goodbye. Timothy has just turned 40, and we realise that we don't need to keep trying to fix our perfect son with help from a slew of specialists. He isn't broken and never was.

SV: I'm surprised it's taken this long for you to come to that conclusion. Timothy is not flawed. Just because he's never spoken doesn't mean he's disabled. His presence alone has always been powerful and full of greatness.

TD: Right, he's a chip off the old block, wouldn't you agree?

SV: (Inaudible murmuring, ending with a loud chuckle that leads to everyone laughing) What took you so long? Was it my charm? My irresistible charm that you couldn't part with? But why decide to move on now?

TM: Do you remember Timothy's first beautiful word?

FIRST WORD
FIK?I MOKD

TD: So many people we had to rid ourselves of – Maude, Lloyd, Paula, Sandy, Toby, Charles, Daniel, Leroy, Melody, Carver, Terry, Angela... the list is endless. Each one adopting that grating, fake baby-talk, and we just couldn't subject Timothy to that. Remember the look on his face, Sanjay? When Maude started with her babbling, Timothy's pained expression said it all. We couldn't let the banality of their so-called normality affect him. Why on earth would anyone desire to be mundane when they could embrace their unique, individualistic quirks?

SV: You're right. And in spite of your madness, your overbearing ways, and the excessive tests you put him through, you've raised someone truly extraordinary – a gem. Timothy may be the closest thing to perfection the world has seen. His list of achievements is astounding. And yet, he hasn't spoken a word. How is that possible?

407

TM: And let's not forget the list of things we've done for him. We nurtured his brilliance and suppressed the mundane. Even before Timothy was born, while he was still in the womb, we started reading to him. History, memoirs, health, nutrition, essays, comedy – everything. Our eagerness for him to learn was insatiable, reminiscent of a middle-aged, recently divorced person in a bar that reeks of despair. We wanted Timothy to absorb the world through words, to grasp understanding, to develop empathy and compassion. Most of all, we wanted to propel him light-years ahead of those who are content with a pedestrian life. With every word we read, his eyes gleamed with joy, warming our hearts to their core.

HISTORICAL + MEMOIR + HEALTH
HI?LOKICV? + I?MEMOIR + HEV?LIH

NUTRITION + ESSAYS + COMEDY
I?NUTRITION + E?SSAYS + COMEDY

SV: Initially, I questioned your motives, but now, I recognize the genius interwoven within your madness.

TM: Our intention wasn't so much to protect him, but rather, we were exploiting him as a remedy for our own afflictions. Like you, we've experienced a lifetime of incessant noise—relentless misery that doesn't cease for even a second. Imagine descending in the elevator from our condo at 5 AM, only to be confronted by a news story on the screen about five children perishing in a distant house fire. No names provided; just an impersonal tragedy. These children are strangers to us, and yet the burden of their demise is thrust upon us—before we've even had a single human interaction that day. What are we to do with this burden? Unload it onto the next unsuspecting person we meet? That is precisely what many resort to, with their opening remarks often being something like, "Hey, did you hear about that kid in Africa devoured by a lion?" I implore them to stop.

Why recount such horror?

Their response: "Because it's in the paper."

We don't need to parrot everything we're told, yet it seems we're compelled to do just that. Then, to distract our workers awaiting job assignments, I switch on the television, only to be greeted by a blustering politician, drowning in self-pity, and spouting a slew of falsehoods.

The TV pundits then flit between topics: sports, weather, the stock market, local calamities, and global despair. Clarity sets in as our view of the world becomes bleak; it seems we're all vying against each other in a broken world. The TV offers a moment of levity—perhaps to soothe us?

And then, it's back to the routine: shower, rinse, repeat.

Sanjay, our society seems to lionize death when it comes in large numbers. A tragic accident killing numerous children or athletes garners more attention and elicits a profound communal grief as opposed to a smaller tragedy. Yet, if the same day a single family perishes in an overlooked roadside calamity, their story is overshadowed by the larger headline. We find ourselves mourning the tally, not the individuals.

When a celebrity passes, the world halts to extol their virtues, often glossing over their flaws or, in some cases, willfully ignoring acts as heinous as rape—simply because of their prowess with a ball.



Sanjay, we turn a blind eye to rape; ponder the implications of such indifference. Consider the shockwave through the sports world when a revered athlete perished in a tragic helicopter crash.

Amidst the mourning, some commentators chose to sideline past allegations with statements like, “If he inspired one kid to leave the streets and play basketball, let’s not dredge up the rape allegations now.”

Such remarks disgust and suggest undertones of racism, not to mention the appalling implication that some social benefit could make up for such a grave offense.

Timothy absorbed these soundbites, mulling over their meanings, yearning to make a difference.

409

I need to catch my breath, but still, there’s more I must articulate. Despite heartfelt sympathy for anyone who loses a loved one, I must confess – and this may sound insensitive – I cannot engage with this constant harrowing narrative. We cannot fix the world. We struggle to manage our own lives; how can we strive for happiness amid this relentless bombardment of sorrow?

Our aim in parenting Timothy was not protection in the traditional sense; we wanted to give him a fighting chance in life. To encourage him to develop without the dubious influences of a troubled world. Even as a toddler, Timothy sensed the futility and emptiness in the small talk we practiced with acquaintances out of social obligation. Yet, when our conversations were authentic and sparked naturally with friends, Timothy’s joy was undeniable.

SV: TM, you’re right; we seem consumed by chaos. The world is indeed beautiful, and most people mean well, but –

TD: Misery loves to multiply in company. Silence can be a source of strength; humanity hasn't outgrown its pettiness. A stranger approaches me at work, someone I don't recognize, someone I've never seen. Yet, he has the audacity, disguised as politeness, to ask, "How was your weekend?" I choose not to respond. His confusion grows, so he probes further, "Anything new? Did you enjoy last evening?" "What's happening?" "Where's your wife?" "Catch the game last night?" "Heard about that guy in Germany who – " "Hang on, Trump's on TV." "Did you catch what Trump said –?"

My patience snaps. I YELL, **"I JUST SAW TRUMP ON TV ALONGSIDE YOU. What's wrong with you?"**

"I'm just trying to be friendly."

Enough already. You don't know me. And honestly, why would my weekend matter to you? Sanjay, isn't it maddening? A simple "Hello," maybe followed by a genuine "How are you?" – that's all that's necessary. Silence can be so soothing.

TM: That's the lesson we wanted Timothy to learn. Live grandly. Steer clear of small talk. It's this very small talk that elevates narcissistic sociopaths like the 45th to power, while we're all too dazed, bombarding each other with nonsensical questions.

Our imperfections are what make us human. Sanj, try doing this with your wife, Amanda: take a lengthy walk, say for a couple of hours, and the first to talk loses.

How long can you remain silent?

Humans crave to hear their own voices; I wager that within blocks, one of you will desperately fill the silence, revealing the utter insignificance of your words.

SV: What do you mean?

TM: One of you will fail to cherish the silence together. One of you won't be able to hold back. It could be over something as trivial as, "Wasn't that building once painted blue?"

And then the onslaught begins – ten minutes discussing an utterly irrelevant building. Wouldn't silence be preferable?

SV: Like Timothy?

TD: Timothy is different. He's been spared the mundane interrogations of "How was your flight?" or "How was the concert?"

Instead, he's channeled his focus into a parchment of accomplishments.

What's your dinner plan tonight, Sanj? Is your wife asleep right now?

Exactly my point. Now, let's delve into Timothy's scroll of achievements:

- Valedictorian in every level of schooling: elementary, high school, and university.
- Adored universally; not just by girls, but also boys – and by that, I mean by all boys; not just the ones who are interested in boys.
- The admiration from his peers never waned.
- At two, he read "The Catcher in the Rye."
- Playdates were permitted. Timothy's companions had to engage in physical activities but also make time for intellectual growth. No childish shows, documentaries were favoured.
- His final playdate was at four years old, with a boy named Gord. Gord insisted on "SpongeBob." Timothy wouldn't have it. When Gord persisted, Timothy destroyed the TV. Gord fled, terrified, never to return.
- In ninth grade, he met Perdita. Smitten, they clicked instantly. When we questioned how Perdita could bear the quiet, she responded, "Mr. and Mrs. T, it's not quiet at all. Our love is loud. Timothy's eyes are vibrant with life, his smile is magnetic, and his silent voice showers warmth, empathy, and assurance. Perhaps the real question is, why aren't you two listening?"
- Oh, and sports – Timothy excelled. He became a top golfer at 13, dominated tennis tournaments, shone in Little League Baseball, and excelled as a quarterback – without ever uttering a single play call.

SV: A quarterback without a voice.

TD: It was fortuitous that a coach recognized his untapped potential, seeing clearly that Timothy was neither deaf, dumb, nor blind; rather, he possessed a remarkable talent that surpassed any precedent. They devised a system where the center would call out the signals instead. His exceptional athleticism earned him a full scholarship to Stanford, as well as back-to-back Heisman Trophies.

Perdita, steadfast in her pursuit to become a neurologist, was right there with him on a full scholarship of her own, until –

SV: She became pregnant with twins, Kieran, and Taran. Inspired by Timothy's determination, Perdita didn't let her pregnancy impede her residency. In an extraordinary twist, she completed a complicated brain surgery on the same day she gave birth; her water broke just after the last stitch. And as for Taran and Kieran, they're never short on conversation.

TM: Never. They are the epitome of joy. Taran aspires to emulate his father, though with his/her own loquacious twist.

SV: Timothy was similar; he never avoided expression. Instead, he found other ways to communicate. His valedictorian speech in high school, read aloud by Perdita, was nothing short of transcendent. It cast a radiant light on his destiny to inspire countless others. His selective silence likely contributed to his profound focus and success.

TD: Another potential advantage was his natural avoidance of inane chatter. He valued genuine interaction too much to partake in it. And despite his silence, his contentment was palpable – so much so that it dissuaded others from engaging in trivial talk with him. He still overhears mundane conversations – about sleeping patterns, grocery lists, and trivial questions – but he dismisses them effortlessly, prioritizing what's meaningful to him and, in turn, to us.

SV: Indeed, your son is extraordinary. Not only did he win two Heisman Trophies, obliterating every statistical record for a quarterback, but he also faced an all-too-familiar prejudice. Like many black quarterbacks before him, the NFL dismissed his talents. His narrative may resonate with many, but the league demands its players embody and articulate tired tropes and platitudes. The expectation of athletes spouting “give 110%,” “fight for every inch,” or “can't focus on the...” is laughable.

Have you noticed how sportscasters lock eyes, pretending to listen while clearly just awaiting their turn to say more of the same, to dilute our intellect?

It's ironically humorous. Timothy didn't fit into the NFL's promotional construct. So...

TM: So, he took his talents to Vancouver and played for 5 years with the BC Lions in the Canadian Football League – leading them to 5 championships and setting records that may never be broken. Far beyond athletics, his legacy bloomed through his compassion: visiting children in hospitals, starting a charitable foundation, and donating half of his modest CFL salary toward fighting homelessness. Perdita matched his generosity with half her own physician’s salary. They made a difference, selflessly and without regard for nationality, an extraordinary gesture of humanity for a country they had no obligation to cherish.

413

FOOTBALL BRAINS

TD TM: He indeed redefined our communication. Consider our son. Our beloved, quiet child. PAY ATTENTION. Initially, he transformed our discourse, eliminating labels (except if it is your pronoun) such as “they,” “them,” and terms like “African American unemployment,” “Hispanic unemployment,” “Female unemployment.” He chose to celebrate unique identities instead of advocating for diversity, which he perceived as restrictive.

He cherished cultural celebration over criticism and held the conviction that our varied backgrounds are what bind us together.

He contends that the origins of addiction are entrenched in the words we use. He argues that politicians manipulate the anguish of the disadvantaged in a zero-sum game – convincing those at the bottom of the social hierarchy that someone is even worse off, thereby enabling the political elite to dominate the thoughts of the afflicted to retain power.

414

Timothy dismisses this as nonsense. He deems the government as functioning akin to a drug dealer, with society’s most vulnerable as addicts craving their next destructive fix.

According to Timothy, the rise of someone like Trump can be attributed to a fundamental misdiagnosis. He is convinced that the evils of division are propagated by lies and misinformation, which thrive through malignant rhetoric. He observes that corruption escalates whenever terms like “Black,” “Hispanic,” “Asian,” “Female” are employed (or unemployed) for political gain.

Our son is of the firm belief that a shift in the way we converse could significantly heal the world’s ailments.

DIALOGUE
DIALOGUE

SV: And so, he altered the dialogue. What he has accomplished must surely fill you with joy. Is Perdita asleep now?

TD TM: Ugh. Your inquiry reeks of insincerity. You know perfectly well that you're jesting.

When Timothy took office as Senator, his first order of business was to reform derogatory language. Terms such as 'homeless,' 'junkie,' or 'addict' were officially banned.

Despite pushback from those who opposed political correctness – the very people who would shout “GET A JOB” the loudest – his Language Reform Bill passed overwhelmingly.

SV: It was astounding that it passed at all. After the bill's passage, Trump steered clear of Washington State – clearly, he no longer had a foothold there.

415

What your son did next was – put simply – startling and extraordinary. He revamped the entire capitalist system. He exploited the public's short attention spans to enact broad, and in some cases, radical reforms to our way of life!

TD: Ah, yes. Magnificent. Ingenious. Exquisite. Our boy transformed the economic landscape in Washington State. He reduced the wealth gap in the stronghold of Gates and Bezos. What an achievement. He never dreamed that his proposals would succeed. He believed that the ultra-wealthy would thwart his bold moves every step of the way.

SV: But they did not oppose him. It appeared as though the super-rich had an epiphany – that they had been centuries ahead and now their very souls were on the line, with the devil himself watching closely.

INITIATIVES

Timothy never expected his initiatives to be approved, let alone with such overwhelming support. Yet, they were – all of them.

****INITIATIVE 1:**** Right to housing with a private bathroom for all citizens, regardless of social status.

****INITIATIVE 2:**** Access to weekly home deliveries of fresh, nutritious food for every citizen, irrespective of social standing.

Critics predicted these policies would breed laziness. Those fiercely opposed, particularly on the political right, protested, “I’ve worked hard for everything I have; the so-called losers should go get jobs.”

Timothy understood that while we are born equal in spirit, in reality, equality is a myth. Accepting that for some, the lowest rung of society’s ladder is the highest they’ll reach, he believed that by providing for everyone, addiction and crime rates would plummet. And they did. Streets became safer, and the international community started to pay attention.

****INITIATIVE 3:**** Enabled ambitious citizens to improve their living conditions and aspire for luxury, with opportunities to upgrade their housing within their communities, even within the same building. Housing was no longer subject to the free market, fostering a construction boom and improved housing tailored to population needs.

****INITIATIVE 4:**** The Game Changer. Capped personal savings at 10% of monthly earnings. The rest must be spent, promoting economic activity. Unspent funds are forfeited to the state for investment in education, infrastructure, and the arts.

****INITIATIVE 5:**** Limited inheritance to prevent wealth hoarding. Upon death, a person could leave behind only 10% of their wealth to heirs. Homes reverted to the public housing pool. Heirs had to spend any inheritance within three months, with unspent portions going to the government. To everyone's surprise, even ****INITIATIVE 5**** was passed without difficulty. It seemed that some wealthy individuals found a sense of relief in avoiding family disputes over inheritance. "Your son certainly knows how to foster a sense of equality," one person noted. And indeed, Washington State emerged as a model, not only for the USA but for the world.

****INITIATIVE 6:**** Abolished elite-centric education, ensuring equal educational opportunities for rich and poor alike. Classrooms became melting pots of society.

****INITIATIVE 7:**** Introduced mandatory technology breaks. Six hours daily were set aside to be tech-free, encouraging face-to-face interactions and strengthening community ties.

"Initiative 7—how on earth did he pass that?" someone asked.

Embracing a social media strategy reminiscent of Trump's, Timothy highlighted the actual detriments of technology addiction.

The initiative had an unexpected but positive side effect: a surge in overall happiness. As a result, relationships grew stronger, and the divorce rate plummeted. Local businesses, particularly restaurants, bars, and coffee shops, benefited immensely from this upturn, witnessing remarkable increases in patronage. Furthermore, a renewed sense of community blossomed as people began to greet one another with friendly "hellos" that often evolved into meaningful conversations.

And there was one final policy before he left office, wasn't there?" another inquired.

"Oh yes, ****INITIATIVE 8****," came the reply. A seemingly trivial yet impactful policy banned left-hand turns on main roads unless from a designated turn lane. A small change, but one represented proudly by a bumper sticker.

418

IF YOU CAN'T MAKE IT HOME MAKING ONLY RIGHT TURNS,

YOU WILL NEVER MAKE IT HOME

SV: As our conversation draws to a close, I reflect on the 40 years that have shaped our bond. The memories we've created are treasures I'll hold dear. With a patient waiting, I must wrap up this chapter of our shared history.

But wait, there's something you mentioned earlier—you wanted to tell me something important, something that signals the end of this chapter. What is it?

TD + TM: Timothy broke the silence. When he spoke, his voice was like an angel's—a deep, resonant baritone reminiscent of Samuel L. Jackson.

His words left us trembling ever since.

SV: Oh, my goodness, that's incredible news! I can barely contain myself. What happened? Please, tell me everything! What did he say?

TD: We were celebrating Timothy's fortieth birthday at his favorite pasta spot. His beautiful wife, Perdita, was right by his side. It was a night of laughter, free-flowing drinks, and then—

SV: And then?

TM: An old playmate of Timothy's, I believe his name was Gord—right, darling?

It's not important. Anyway, he came over to our table. It had been 36 years since they'd last seen each other, and yet, somehow, Timothy recognized him.

SV: And then?

TD: Gord confidently approached Timothy, took his hand, and peered into his soulful brown eyes. With the softest tone, he asked, "What's new? How's your evening going?"

SV: And?

TM: And there was a moment of silence before Timothy, with remarkable poise, spoke his first words, "I don't understand the questions."

THE ART OF LISTENING



420

Wrapped in a heavy cloak of melancholy, Vincent and Melissa have found themselves being love's faithful disciples for over thirteen long years. Within this time frame, they've stood as silent witnesses to an ever-evolving world, a transformation so colossal and profound it has remolded humanity and the bonds with those they once held close.

421

Their hearts grow heavier with a gnawing dread, as they've come to realize that the incessant clamour of media and the technological cacophony has, it seems, dulled the collective capacity for deep listening, for engaging in meaningful dialogues untouched by the scourge of polarization.

For this pair, there is a shared, intuitive wisdom; a recognition that while conversation is an art form borne of minutiae, the current discourse has been cheapened to the most inane exchanges.

“What’s new?” echoes with a hollowness that chills the soul, while idle prattle over meteorological trivialities strikes them as the epitome of intellectual emptiness.

422

“How old is your dog?”

The question might seem innocent, yet to Vincent, it epitomizes a profound disdain. This distaste is reserved especially for acquaintances – those whom he counts as friends, and with whom he’s shared more than just fleeting moments – when they opt for such vapid icebreakers rather than the sincerity of a “hello,” followed by an unforced flow of authentic conversation.

In Vincent's view, people ought to share their truths not on cue, but rather at a time of their choosing, a sharing influenced by the rich warmth of personal connection, often dictated by emotional bank accounts which have grown with the hands of time.

Melissa, on the other hand, bears an empathetic understanding for the weariness plaguing the masses. She sees the legions of individuals wading through an onslaught of 3,296 spam emails and calls each day – an ever-present deluge offering false promises of windfalls or threats from unseen adversaries demanding money. A common ploy designed to ensnare the unsuspecting in a web wrought by greed and deception.

423

I t's in the midst of this digital quagmire that Vincent encounters his own Orwellian nightmare. An ominous email slithers into his inbox, claiming his computer camera had been hijacked, and with it, his most private indulgences. The faceless extortionists demand a ransom of \$2,300, threatening to broadcast his intimate moments to an unsuspecting world. Failure to comply would result in the obliteration of his reputation, like a glass house shattered by a hail of stones.

Vincent's ancient desktop computer squats on his desk, a relic devoid of modern amenities such as a camera. Unlike most, he has an aversion to the lurid allure of pornography – his libido hasn't compelled him to self-indulgence in over a decade. Instead, thrice daily and without fail, a discreet and clinical service arrives at his abode to attend to his needs, maintaining what they clinically refer to as 'prostate health.' They come with the promise of ensuring his plumbing remains unobstructed, operating with the precision and sterility of a hospital procedure; occasionally sporting sexy hand teddies.

As Vincent and Melissa settle into their well-worn living room couch, they power on the television, a medium now verging on obsolescence, its glow as fleeting as the last gasps of an incurable pestilence. The bland script of network programming unfolds before them. The characters on the screen engage in a hollow ballet of dialogue, each speaking in turn with mechanical precision. They seem to be mere conduits for scripted lines, none showing the faintest glimmer of genuine connection.

425

Later, in the company of friends, a stark observation unfolds before **Vincent and Melissa**: their companions are arrayed in geometric precision around a table—be it a square or a rectangle—as if participating in some secular ritual. Each person appears cocooned in their own thoughts, scarcely listening to the ones who speak before them. In their eyes, a palpable eagerness, an impatience to discharge their mental cache into the conversation. But there's no true exchange, merely a contest to seize the conversational spotlight.

426

This pattern of disconnection seeps into every facet of their lives, draining them, one weary moment at a time. News headlines flash across another screen, an endless cascade of global calamity.

Yet, amidst the doom, insurance companies prey on those over fifty with morbid jest, peddling life policies as if they were tickets to a comedy show about Death himself.

In the midst of their evening, one friend veers wildly from the script of social niceties. He launches into a tirade against the incumbent Canadian Prime Minister, his words laced with conviction and a biting distrust. He declares his intent to vote for the adversary in the upcoming election, convinced that the rival harbours a sacred respect for economic vitality.

Vincent, a silent sentinel amidst this dissonance, chooses reflection over rebuttal. The timing is not right to challenge the fallacies of his friend's political tirade, to unravel the bias and misunderstanding woven throughout.

427

Within him, the recognition of an unfortunate political truth simmers: blame and disillusionment are a reigning currency, and they taint the narrative painted by both the populace and the opponents alike.

Power begets antipathy, while any hint of progressive policy is savagely attacked, undermining earnest attempts at societal reform. For in the paradox of governance, allowing progress to blossom would leave the opposition barren of issues to champion.

Vincent withdrew to ponder how to convey to his friend the critical importance of awareness. He wanted to articulate the disturbing reality that often those who seem oppositional, such as Trump, are in league with malevolence.

428

Across our planet, seductively charismatic despots vie to sway the destinies of all who are not white or do not fit neatly into binary categories.

Together, Vincent and Melissa recognized the weariness weighing on society—a fatigue exacerbated by the exhaustive onslaught of spam and the shallow allure of popular culture.

People are simply too drained to fully grasp the shifting tides around them. They took a moment to reflect on the deluge of information meant to capture their attention each day, an overwhelming list that read like a morbid checklist of contemporary life:

- Rudy Giuliani and the latest political scandal.
- The heart-wrenching cost of vegetables.
- Oil prices soaring, crippling budgets.
- A supply chain in disarray.
- The relentless march of AI, deemed more valuable than human effort.
- Homelessness linked to sudden surges of violence.
- Trump persisting in the social consciousness.
- A relentless barrage of new apps to peruse.
- Gaza, a name laden with unceasing conflict.
- The CRA's punitive measures against numerous citizens.
- An elderly woman in Saskatchewan entangled in a drug scandal.
- Eight souls lost; their stories reduced to a statistic in a fire.
- A bus accident in Italy, claiming lives and leaving an echo of sorrow.
- The triviality of a closet innovation, hawked as life-changing.
- A reviewer's cinematic journey promising to filter our viewing choices.

429

And amid this cascade of information, a rising demagogue denounces non-white individuals as the “**poison**” in society’s veins, demanding support.

Yet Tony, drowning in the reality of unaffordable rent, is left wondering where his concerns fit amid the noise.

With a world so focused on what’s trending, vital human experiences and suffering are sidelined.

Harold's life had become an oppressive slide of despair, his heart weighed with the unbearable notion of advancing age and the possibility of impending homelessness clawing at his hope.

He felt himself perched hazardous and hapless on life's precipice, teetering to a fall that whispered persistent thoughts of suicide. ⁽¹⁾

Amidst the discord of indifference, only one soul dared to reach across the abyss with a tentative hand of affection. Yet their gesture, while rooted in kindness, rang hollow to Harold's ears. Their mundane inquiry, "What's new?" felt like salt on his raw wounds, a question deaf to the crescendo of pain resonating within him.

When someone is grappling with the titanic struggle to merely exist, the well-meaning platitudes of "**others endure worse,**" or the thoughtless redirection to someone else's survival tale proved only to exacerbate his isolation.

In sharp contrast stood Mellisa and Vincent, two kindred spirits who navigated the nuances of human suffering with the grace of silent companionship. Their names often interspersed in conversations about those with garrulous tendencies – accusations cloaking their true essence.

What others mistook for a relentless torrent of words was, in fact, the artistry of empathy in listening. These two had cultivated the rare talent of holding space, purely present for the echoes of unheard struggles.

431

Flipping the script of societal norms, Mellisa and Vincent knew the power of silence. Their willingness to sit in quietude with another's pain had rendered them architects of sanctuary for weary souls.

They understood life's overwhelming pressure, that sensation of being inexorably drowned in a world saturated with mindless noise.

And thus, they harvested the wisdom of the unheard, allowing it to seep into the soil of their being. When they offered words, they sprouted not from the barren land of dismissive clichés but blossomed from deep, reflective soil, conveying a resonance that could only be nurtured through assiduous listening.

To master the alchemy of listening is to become the custodian of countless untold narratives.

432

It's to stand as a testament to the profound narrative that every life, every heartache, every silenced cry is a story, yearning only for a compassionate witness.

Both Mellisa and Vincent, with ears wide open and hearts unfenced, embrace the majestic tales unfolding before them, knowing the simple act of listening, is an offering of incalculable worth.



1) After surviving more than four grueling years adrift in a tempestuous sea of personal trials, the writer of this manuscript, his soul weathered and weary from the relentless assault of despair, took to the dimly lit stage of Social Media to declare a morose and final performance – he intended to live-stream his own demise on the bleak midwinter morning of Christmas Day. His chilling proclamation was a desperate cry, springing from an abyss of dread at the thought of spiraling into homelessness; a cruel fate as the shadows of economic ruin closed in around him. Amidst the stridency of digital voyeurism and indifference, a solitary voice pierced through the thick veil of his isolation. One compassionate friend reached out, their words a tentative whisper against the howl of his anguish, “I do not wish to see anyone “live-streaming their death.” If you want to talk...” The mere idea of voicing his pain once more seemed futile – a redundant echo in a void of apathy. ‘Who truly hears?’ he pondered; a wry smile tainted with bitterness gracing his lips. Indeed, perhaps there was one; yet to his spent spirit, the world had grown indifferent, weary from its own burdens. In this shared exhaustion, the writer found a grim camaraderie. Still, the presence of depression crouched ever-present in his solitude, its malevolent gaze creeping from the concealed corners of his fragmented psyche – a dark, sinister entity swathed in the pall of his own desolation.

Smoke + Mirrors: Cities and Compassion an Economic Ruse



435



Embarking on this manuscript, I envisioned it as an insignificant murmur, a thread of randomness unravelled from the labyrinth of my restless mind. But as I tether my existence to a steel rope and drag it across life's uneven terrain, I find myself ensnared in its treacherous coils. The eyelet—that cursed aperture—refuses to yield. With each fruitless tug, steel splinters skewer my flesh, a cruel reminder of the pain engulfing me as my vocation disintegrated into the void.

I watch the years tick by, each one marking the steady decline of my family's financial security — 60, 61, 62, 63, and now, on the cusp of 64 — our existence teetering on the precipice of ruin.

My desperation mounts as I send out job application after job application, a relentless stream of hope cast into the void, a desperate attempt to prevent my family from becoming casualties of homelessness.

The TV blares, a searing cacophony of the world's relentless noise. Flickering images and blaring voices spill from the television, narrating the plight of a young man mangled in the savage jaws of a swimming accident. It's a young man, broken by a dive into still waters, his family's plight broadcasted for sympathy and aid.

The GoFundMe page their beacon of salvation, quivering with the potential to raise the \$50,000 for his treatment abroad. It sparks a bitter laughter within me. I had erected a GoFundMe page, too – a feeble cry into the digital void for assistance as each month beckoned the shadow of homelessness closer.

But sympathy does not extend to a man like me, marred by the stigma of being seen nursing a beer, the tonic for my suffocating predicament.

437

I freeze, emotions swelling as the injured young man echoes the platitude, "Others have it worse." The words are a knife, twisting into the raw flesh of my experience.

A primal urge to scream engulfs me – a scream for recognition that every individual's battle is valid, despite the scorn of those who dismiss our struggles as trifling, who do not bear the weight of our lives or the right to cheapen our pain with their indifference.

This manuscript was never meant to be a tome of darkness, yet it has become a testimonial to the trials faced by my family, now involuntary participants in this grim social experiment.

Amidst the constant rejection from the job market, it dawns on me that my only remaining asset is the wisdom procured from nearly 64 years of living – a life of observation and listening, punctuated by the sharp release of humour, my weapon of choice to lance the bubbling abscess of my reality.

438

I accept with resignation my crowdfunding plea will likely yield nothing. I lack the compelling narrative of a visible tragedy, the classic archetype to elicit empathy and open wallets.

I'm just an everyman battling the vicissitudes of existence, seeking solace in brief reprieves, aware such indulgences, such as sipping a beer, provide others with the comforting illusion their successes are solely born of superior choices rather than the blind grace of fortune.

439

A block's journey in my shoes – what unfurls before me?
Suffering cloaked in the banal.
A mayor's hollow enthusiasm for Sloppy Joes fails to
mask his pandering; my instinct revolts at the insincerity.

Another block, where the jingle of coins from a
beggar's cup is a siren song highlighting our shared
plight. I, too, am a hair's breadth away from extending
my own hand, forever teetering on the brink of dire
need.

440

The rift widens – those who wobble on the precipice of despair are
deemed eyesores, inconvenient truths to be cleansed from the
consciousness of the “concerned” citizens who, deep down,
couldn't care less.

A friend recently enthused about the unique perspective my writings offer, flattering my ego with words of encouragement, suggesting my voice – a blend of insight and hardened skepticism – is one the world needs more of, even in the sullied world of politics.

441

And so, from Vancouver to Munich, politicians peddle their visions—grandiose plans and platitudes without substance, the Sloppy Joes they promise never reaching the mouths of those they serve.

442

It's a global theater, where every city vies for the same fleeting dollars, riches of gold, all the while neglecting the cries of its own aching citizens.

In the shadowed corners of progress, where a major company plants its roots promising a cascade of jobs - a mere four paying a living wage - the city's underbelly swells with despair. People tumble into the streets, their plight invisible to those cloaked in the sanctity of 'family values,' blind to the humanity they once recognized in each other.

443

The rhetoric of 'think of the children' rings hollow, as if those falling were never children, only to become society's latest scourge.

The proprietor of a local craft brewery laments the prohibitive costs of his trade, while a man tormented by poverty succumbs to theft, taking an apple. He is quickly assailed by a loss prevention officer, who himself teeters on the brink of financial ruin.

444

Those who watch from a safer vantage offer silent approval, yet they too cannot escape the trauma of witnessing poverty's brutal realities. They gossip about the distress before them, painting the impoverished as a plague to be erased, not seeing their shared humanity or the underlying systemic failures.

Just over the border, a blustering politician rouses his crowd with venom, decrying perceived enemies poisoning bloodlines.

445

Meanwhile, I fight to make rent, overhearing acquaintances coldly debate the 'clean-up' of homelessness and poverty as if discussing an unsightly stain on their conscience.

They yearn to scrub away the guilt, desperate to return to small talk and superficial concerns. Amidst this, my heart aches - I yearn to enact change.

To those who skirmish with adversity, may clarity unveil the true value of existence and inspire a gentler approach towards our global siblings.

Yet, the chasm between the opulent and the struggling widens, the voices of the latter drowned out by the unrelenting drumbeat of privilege dictating who is deserving, even of sickness.

I watch as a famished soul, fearful of public humiliation or literal displacement, seeks refuge in a fast-food restaurant. But even here, they are denied the small mercy of a self-serve soda - a young employee, trained to deny the undeserving, manipulates the machine.

447

When security expels the indigent soul, there's no shelter from the scorn of the masses, whose misunderstanding of the struggle ignores the irony of their own potential fate; as they dine on fast-food.

I listen to the platitudes of the injured swimmer, carefully crafted to plunder emotions and donations from those voyeuristically engaged with suffering.

What treachery is this, that even empathy is subject to commodification?

448

The irony in the narrative is striking; the swimmer who sustained injuries did so through his own actions, yet those who have been neglected by society and find themselves struggling on the streets are often criticized for their supposed bad decisions.

The mayor, his lips smeared with the remnants of a Sloppy Joe, proclaims his dedication to a city clean and secure.
For whom does he toil, if not for those who twine the safety net his words unravel?

My tirade barrels toward the inevitable clasp -
this is not for you, not for me. The
impassioned monologues of civic leaders
ricochet across the globe, camouflaging a continuous
crowdfunding of urban spaces, relentlessly thrust
upon tragedies echoing worldwide.

450

To care profoundly for those in poverty demands Herculean resilience. Most politicians would rather wield brooms or pressure hoses, washing away the discomfort of poverty, than confront the encroaching giant of destitution with truth and transformative policy. Instead, they allure behemoths like Amazon and Tesla with fiscal incentives, further glossing the façade of vitality while the rest of us reckon with the gravity of our depleted pockets.

451

My **confession:** I'm ill-equipped with answers. But in another time, under the mantle of resilience, I may find the nerve to champion the unvoiced, sacrificing political dreams on the altar of necessity.

In essence, the reluctance to enact meaningful change stems from politicians whose primary concern is securing their next electoral victory. To them, showing compassion for the individuals struggling on their own streets is considered politically detrimental, akin to committing career suicide.

452

As consciousness breaks through the veil of sleep, one must grapple with the enigmatic reality of an upmarket second-hand emporium opening on a major street, trading in aspirations, demanding the forsaking of life's necessities as its price.

453

Here, our youth, their spirits already battered by the relentless assault of economic hardship, find themselves lured into the hollow pageantry of so-called conscious consumerism—a seductive masquerade that promises fulfillment but only perpetuates their bondage.

It becomes ever clearer our civic institutions do not bleed for us; they bleed us dry in the guise of urban allure, sweeping those in torment neatly out of the public eye.

454

My desire to leave a positive imprint upon this world
burns fiercely.

455

I watch, an anguished spectator with dreams of change, discerning the tragic comedy of a second-hand store positioned as a beacon of fashion, affordable to few.

Reflect on this sobering vision - a second-hand store, an emblem of sustainability, spawns within the so-called metropolis, selling worn threads at prices rivaling the fleeting allure of fast fashion.

Contemplate this: Could the emerging second-hand store, nestled in the heart of the city, be a stark symbol—a metaphor of increasing hardship jostling for existence amidst the monolithic corporate behemoths and the affluent tourists the city yearns to draw into its embrace?

The very inception of this modest enterprise poses an unspoken challenge to the prevailing narrative of prosperity, weaving a tapestry of resilience in the face of relentless riches.

456

I possess no remedy to soothe the afflictions of our society - perhaps the prospect of solace resides in the yet unfathomed depths, waiting for someone courageous enough to embody its form in deeds and decrees.

457

For now, I travel wearily, eyes fixed on the distant hope that humanity will persevere against the tumultuous storm of apathy and anguish that threatens to swallow us whole.

In the midst of mental fog, I fear the specter of homelessness stalking me.

Subject to the same demographic targeted by the mayor's fast-food-fueled campaign, all in an effort to seem relatable – I cannot recall the taste of a Sloppy Joe.

Still, unlike the political mercenaries, my life-platform would not be built on fabricated nostalgia, aimed to attract votes, but rather on the unvarnished, painful truth of the dispossessed souls around us - once children, now ignored, forgotten, consumed by despair. 'Think of the children?' they implore. But do they, or do they merely wish to avoid the discomfort of recognition; all in an effort to protect property values?

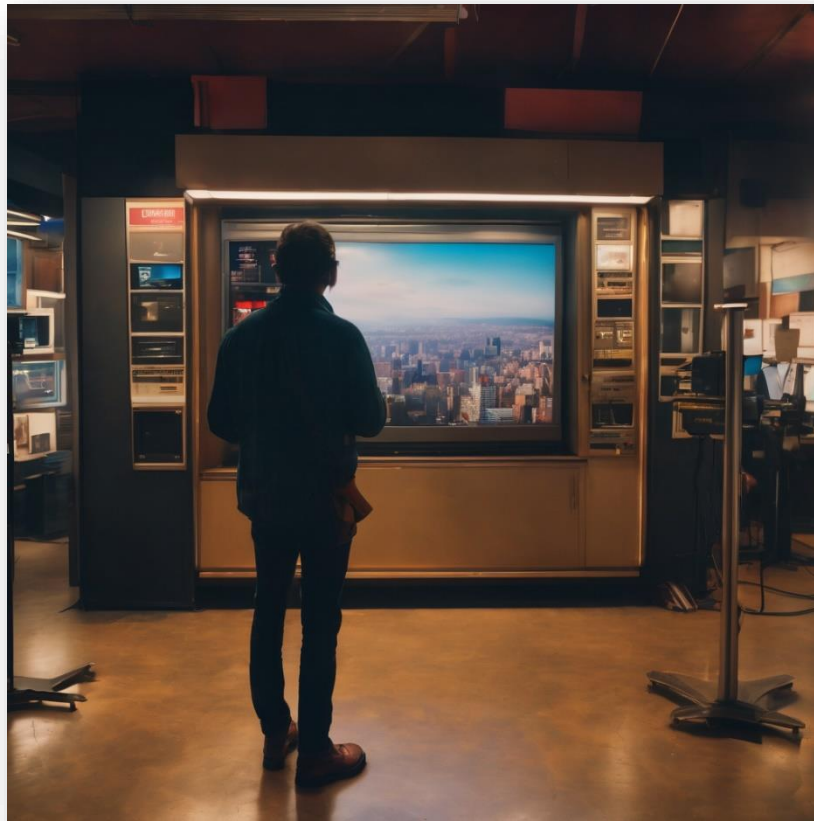
As this chapter of the story draws to an end, the path unclear, I sit, and a stream of words cascades onto the page - approximately 1,800 (in this typing) - a mosaic of rage, reflection, and the relentless search for a conversation to really start.

Does anyone know where I can find a needle with an open eyelet?

And when did we stop thinking of the children?



A FINAL MESSAGE TO THE CBC



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Dear CBC,

As the holiday lights dim and the world celebrates the season of giving, I stand on the precipice of an unnerving new beginning: my partner, our loyal cat, and I are poised to swap the warmth of our home for the chill of the world beyond our doorstep. At 63 and a half years old, a cruel twist of fate snatched away my job at the pandemic's start, sacrificing experience at the altar of youth.

Efforts to forestall our inevitable fate have been relentless—applications for social assistance poured forth, only to be scoffed at by the system. It seems my modest \$495 in Canada Pension Plan payments is laughably adequate in their eyes. Imagine that.

Soon enough, the bolted doors of the life we knew will echo our departure, revealing that true poverty knows no bounds; it waits to embrace not just an aging man but also his long-standing companion and a pet that knows nothing of our human follies.

In my pursuit to remain afloat, I've cast out over 280 job applications, each more humbling than the last. From the somber corridors of hospitals, where I offered to shepherd souls departed to their last earthly chambers, to pitching story upon story to the indifferent eyes at CBC – it appears I have become too intimately acquainted with life's dusk to be entrusted with the departed.

Yet, I persist, armed with little more than stubborn hope and the compulsion to illuminate the silent battles of others caught in this storm.

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Perhaps, in these shared struggles, we find a semblance of solace – if only someone would listen.

Enclosed are the musings of my journey: "Lindsay's Musings - Volume 1" or "The Days in the Life of Lindsay Wincherauk: An Unwanted Son," whichever title you prefer.

I entreat you to not only read but to feel the weight of the words within. There lies a message, a raw echo of the pain we inflict upon each other amidst the cacophony of a world too busy to care. Will you hear it?

**Merry Christmas - Happy Holidays - Season's Greetings
Lindsay Wincherauk and his soon-to-be homeless family.**

EPILOGUE: STARTING A CONVERSATION

Timothy clenched his jaw, watching the man before him. **“Save me your spiel about hard work and pulling yourself up by the bootstraps—I’ve heard it a million times,”** he spat, the venom of reality tinging his words.

The man, clutching his faux leather briefcase like a lifeline, looked unequipped to deal with the raw honesty confronting him. **“You think because you’ve bled and sweated, you’re entitled to mount a pedestal?”** Timothy sneered, his breath fogging in the biting air.

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His eyes flashed scenes of others' lives—the shards of shattered glass crunched underfoot, the echoes of a child's whimper muffled behind thin walls, the relentless shadows of misfortune that stalked some more relentlessly than others.

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“ You haven't witnessed the gauntlet they've run, every punishing blow, every unkind stroke of fate,” he said, a quieter intensity replacing his anger.

He leaned in closer, wanting to etch this understanding into the man's worldview. **“The truth is some only dream of grasping that lowest rung you so nonchalantly step over on your climb to 'success.'”**

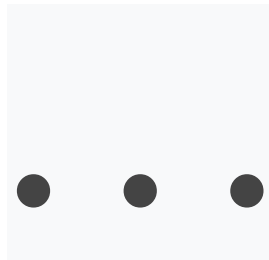
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His gaze softened as he painted a vision of a different world – a world where the grim clasp of addiction and peril loosened its hold with every helping hand extended, where crime's desperate whisper faded into a chorus of communal care. The streets reborn, awash with the safety and vibrancy that flourish under the wings of empathy.

“This isn't just fantasy,” he whispered fiercely.
”“Give everyone a key to a room of their own, a sanctuary with the dignity of a private bath. Fill their kitchens with the earth’s bounty, nutritious and comforting. Watch then.”

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The man's eyes reluctantly began to see it—a flicker of acknowledgement. In Timothy's quiet resolve lay the simple, unshakable belief: every person, irrespective of the invisible social ladder's rung they occupied, deserved these inalienable rights. It was the cornerstone on which a brighter world could be built—one where being 'created equal' in spirit translated into tangible, nurturing equality for all.



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