

Prose



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

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

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

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

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

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## PROSE PROSE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## **E**xposition:

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



## **R**ising Action:

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

## **C**limax:

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

## **F**alling Action:

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

## **R**esolution:

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

Dedicated To:  
Help

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PROSE

The Rom-com  
Deeply. Madly. Truly.

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

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

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

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

Bounding with a whimsical skip, Tiffany navigated the early morning streets until the gnawing pangs of hunger steered her toward the familiar scent of Rodney’s Burger Shack.

She settled into a cozy seat on the patio, her newly acquired novel, "Madly. Truly. Deeply.," placed beside her. It lay next to a cheeseburger combo and a Coke, the spoils of her recent culinary diversion.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Where does the story end and reality begin?

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

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PROSE

French Roast

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## Prose: French Roast

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

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

"Sam, are you stirring from your dreams?"

"I'm ensnared below."

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

"Entombed within the folios of your romance narrative."

"My romance narrative?"

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

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

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

"In truth, you do not."

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

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

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

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

“So, Sam, do I have your accord?”

“Affirmative.”

Crinkle. Crinkle. Crinkle.

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

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

“Do I possess the latitude to decline?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Carver + Reginald: Opposites

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PROSE

Carver + Reginald

Polar Opposites

by Lindsay Wincherauk

## Prose: Carver + Reginald – Polar Opposites

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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PROSE

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Tiffany + Sam  
Beginnings

## Prose: Tiffany + Sam: Beginnings

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Can you get to the post?

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

... POST ...

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

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

... END POST ...

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

17

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

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

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

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

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

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

... ..

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

18

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

20

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

... ..

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

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

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

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

Precisely, | |.

... ..

5

PROSE

Songbirds

23

## Prose: Songbirds



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What's the point of all this? Exactly.

*Tell me why?*

*I don't like Mondays.*

*Tell me why?*

*I don't like Mondays.*

*Tell me why?*

*I don't like Mondays.*

*I want to shoot.*

*The whole day down, down, down.*

*Shoot it all down.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Eventually, I reached Robert Downey Jr’s table.

“And? What did you say to him?”

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

“Seriously?”

“Seriously.”

“And how did he take it?”

“All he did was nod.”

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

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

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

“Carver,” someone murmured in anticipation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Indeed, it was.

“Chantel, you promised I’d get to sing the ‘Batman’ theme,” Robert said before bowing his head in resignation.

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

“Who won?” inquired Robert.

David Duchovny hung his head, silently admitting his defeat.

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

... ..

6

PROSE

29

# Super Fun Love Montage

## Prose: Super Fun Love Montage

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

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

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

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

“Huh?”

“Disregard that.”

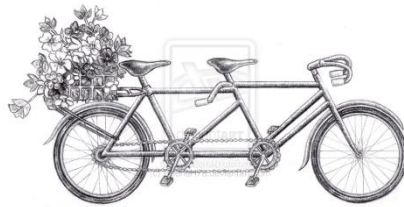
“And the chap over there with the camera—what’s his story?” Tiffany asked.

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

“Have you lost your mind?”

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

“Indulge me.”



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

31

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

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

... ..



“

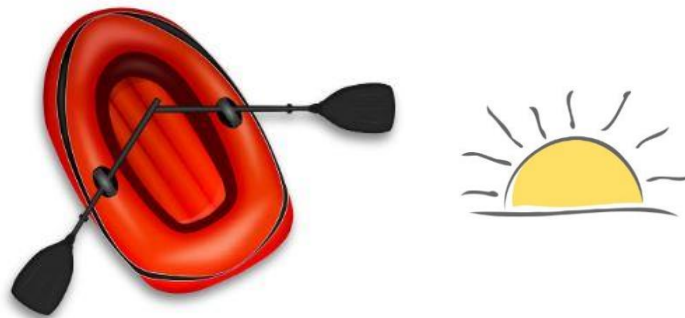
Next, we dine at Lover’s Lookout,” Carver proclaimed. “Sardine kisses and mescal fervour preceding a velveteen tangle atop Raoul’s floral laid masterpiece.”

32

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

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

... ..



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

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

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

... ..



Carver?"

"Yes, buttercup?"

"Do you know who Sparkly Pingle Ball is?"

"Who?" "Never mind."

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

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

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

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

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

... ..

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

When shall my montage research reach its finale?

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

35

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

... ..



7

PROSE

Smitten

36

## Prose: Smitten

Sam inquired, his gaze expectant, as he turned toward Carver amidst the lingering chatter of the dispersing crowd. “So, what did you make of the movie?”

Carver raised an eyebrow, levelling a dry look at his friend, the corners of his mouth twitching with an unamused smirk. “Frankly,” he drawled, “it was underwhelming, to say the least. Considering how the critics raved about it – saying you’d laugh yourself to a veritable death from sheer hysterics – I thought we’d be stepping over bodies on the way out. Yet, here we all are, painfully intact. Sam, hyperbole in reviews like that? It’s like setting a snare for disappointment.”

Arm in arm, Sam and Carver raced down the street, their feet pounding the pavement in a lively search for mirth, inspired by a quirky adage: laughter begets running. This odd notion mirrored the premise of an Action/Adventure/Comedy they had recently watched, aptly titled ‘Runner,’ and starring none other than Usain Bolt.

In this cinematic escapade, Bolt instead of the usual fat suspects, portrays a small-time crook who triggers a kaleidoscopic manhunt by every conceivable law enforcement agency, from S.W.A.T. teams to all the FBI and NCIS units, and even the persistent detectives of Hawaii Five-0.

The movie unfolds as a relentless seven-hour chase where the elusive ‘runner’ Bolt is forever just out of grasp, with law enforcers engaging in comical fartlek training, desperate to match his speed.

The high point of each scene is Hondo’s dramatic lunges, soaring through the air but always falling short, as the enigmatic ‘Rabbit,’ Bolt himself, dashes on.

Indeed, the only break in the wild pursuit comes from the singular line of dialogue – a shouted “Rabbit” – each time Bolt surges forward.

Billed as a comedy yet devoid of real humour, ‘Runner’ is as much an endurance test for the audience as it is for its on-screen pursuers. With nobody dying in the end.

En route to the bar, their eyes are drawn to a poster wrapped around a light pole. “Feeling at your wit’s end? Discover the hilarity of ‘Runner’ – a film that promises laughter until your very last breath.”

It explains the heartening transformation of 47 downtrodden, dishevelled film enthusiasts who emerged from ‘Runner,’ tear-streaked yet inexplicably lighter. On their way out, they clutch a brochure boasting an array of comedies guaranteed to leave you in stitches until the end. Lined up curbside, five eager vans idle, ready to whisk them away to another realm of escapism at the nearest Cineplex.

Tina and Bullet, his name as piercing as their argument, are locked in a intense exchange on the street. Carver, his concern punctuating the air, inquires if all is well. Through her tears, which seem to carve a path down her cheeks, Tina pleads, “Bullet, no, I love you! How can I possibly go on without you?”

Sam interjects with a mischievous grin, “Tina, and I wonder how I even know your name – look, don’t drown in your sorrows over a lost love, because every Tuesday, IKEA hosts the ‘Freshly Broken Up Day.’ It’s where they master the art of morphing a shared life into two shiny, refurbished existences.” *Two homes whence there was one – we hope you break up.*

Peter huddles in the shadowy alcove of a shuttered store, murmuring confessions to indifferent strangers that he favours cats over dogs for their lone-wolf mystique.

Abruptly, a voice barks back, mocking Peter’s naivete – cats, he snorts, are hardly self-sufficient when they can’t even stock their own pantry or tidy up their messes.

Caught off guard, Peter’s face contorts in befuddlement. Without missing a beat, the Property Brothers drift past, a newly minted cat scratching post hoisted between them, oblivious to the exchange.

The Director late to the party barks, “Background.”

One block remains between Cousteau and the bar’s beckoning lights. Beside him, an exchange unfolds with the Postman, his frame slender, his age nearing the seventh decade. With a glint in his eye, he confesses, “I still wake up in the morning, passion stirring within me.” Cousteau offers a nod, and then a wry “Good to know” slipping from his lips. An irrepressible chuckle escapes Carver, breaking the evening’s stillness.

Within earshot, three forlorn souls collapsed, their laughter echoing hauntingly until the last whispers of life fled their bodies. They were sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, grandfathers and grandmothers, gatekeepers, addicts, rapists, and petty thieves. None were fated to return home, their demise sealed by the unexpected consequence of the Postman’s morning arousal and Cousteau’s meticulous note-taking.

Twenty paces from the bar, a pulsating rhythm takes hold, and there, the Brazilian dance troupe commands the air. With each agile move, they tell a tale of grace and power. I fumble mentally for the name – Tapioca? No, that’s not right. Carpaccio? Hardly closer. Ah, it clicks now - Capoeira. With the name finally correct in my mind, I can’t help but silently cheer. Bingo.

The Capoeira troupe's leader erupted into a performance as dynamic as a live wire, his body a whirlwind of motion synchronized with Brazil's relentless rhythms. He vaulted effortlessly from headstands to tortoise poses and seamlessly integrated unconventional moves like kip-ups and burpees.

At the eye of this storm of energy was the Mayor – yes, the Mayor – an octogenarian Caucasian brandishing a cane, not for support, but as a dance prop. A master of the fluid dance-fight art of Capoeira, his every movement defied his years in a breathtaking display that was as bewildering as it was captivating.

Meanwhile, Cousteau looked on, his eyes wide with disbelief. Never in his wildest dreams had he envisioned his elderly friend dubbed 'The Mayor' could move with such improbable grace and power.

“Want to check out this place? I hear it's lit,” Sam suggests as if 'lit' is still a thing.

“Let's do it,” Carver agrees, and they stride into a bar dubbed the Liquor Hole.

Admittedly, it's a terrible name, surpassing even the absurdity of a bar owner, and client in a previous life, who named her establishment “It's a Secret” and then was confused when it failed – no mystery.

During a date in my past, my seemingly meek female companion surprised me by assaulting the bouncer in response to his rudeness towards me, on a night where I performed as a hair model. Meanwhile, the three onlookers doubled over with laughter, picturing my frailty as if the altercation were that night's planned amusement.

The director shouts, “Action.”

“Could we have four double bourbons and a pitcher of beer?” Carver's voice, steady and sure, cuts through the din of the nearly deserted Liquor Hole. He locks eyes with the bar's strapping male server.

In the furthest corner, a solitary figure lurks in the shadows, a mirage in the dim light. It's Reginald, Carver's twin, an enigmatic presence wrapped in a mysterious haze of smoke, his features hauntingly mirroring Carver's own.

“Sam, she's stolen my heart. Tiffany, she's the one,” Carver confesses, a goofy grin spreading across his face. “You've played cupid, my friend. I owe you everything for this.”

“Cheers to that!”

Sam and Carver knock back their bourbons, the liquid fire stoking the emotions within. Their beer mugs clink in a hearty follow-up as Sam proclaims, “I’ve always said it – you two are a celestial match.”

The air grows thick around them, a haze forming that has no place in the smoke-free sanctum of the bar – a reflection of some inner turmoil, no doubt. A wave of irritation washes over Carver, but thoughts of Tiffany quickly douse it. “She’s everything, Sam. I’m going to do it – I’m going to ask for Tiffany’s hand.”

“In marriage?”

“No, Sam, I genuinely want her hand – for my mantelpiece.”

“Are you being sarcastic?”

“Of course not. Yes, I mean in marriage, obviously.”

Usain Bolt flashes by the window in a blur of speed. Hondo lunges after him, but with the gracelessness of a bird slamming into a skyscraper, he crashes into the bar’s patio doors. Reginald rushes to Hondo’s side, hoisting him up with a steady grip.

“I’ve decided its time – I’m proposing to Tiffany.”

“Seriously? This calls for an epic bachelor bash to end all bashes!”

“When can you pull off such a legendary soiree?”

“Two Saturdays from now. Mark it down.”

Reginald, like a fly on the wallpaper, etches a cunning plan on his bar tab, the ink barely keeping pace with his racing heart: In the haze of the evening, with Sam and Carver guzzling spirits like a scene from a Nicolas Cage film, I’ll seize the moment. I’ll take Butterfly’s hand, captivate her heart, and whisk her away on an exhilarating Love Montage escapade straight out of the silver screen fantasies. She’ll soar, heart aflutter, completely unaware she’s falling into my carefully spun web, the echo of my sinister laughter intertwining with our footsteps – all unbeknownst to my older brother as he swills his life away.

Across town at the Cineplex, an eerie misfortune befell forty-seven unsuspecting theatregoers. Intent on seeing the hit comedy “LOL Till You Die,” they instead filed into the wrong theatre, only to become ensnared in the ironically titled “No-Background Check Required” – a grim twist of fate aligning all too well with their unintended wish for oblivion.

The chapter's suspense hinges on a breath-hanging query: Will Tiffany respond with an affirmation?

"Yes," comes the reply, clear and unwavering.

"Is that you, Tiffany?"

"No," the voice retorts, a shade cooler.

"Then who speaks?"

A firm "YES," echoes again, defiant in its obscurity. "Owner of a Lonely Heart," the voice claims, almost taunting.

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*Will they grasp the reference, you think?*

"Doubtful," comes the dry chuckle in response.

"Are you invoking the spirit of Charlie Kaufman now?"

"Possibly," the admission is shrouded in mystery.

Laughter dark and resonant, Reginald's mirth grows, a sinister undercurrent to the chapter's end.

Carver is smitten.

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8  
PROSE  
Stag

42

## Prose: Stag

It was a steamy spring day in Sleeping Seagull, with the relentless sun beating down on the streets like a welder mastering their craft. *Flashdance. Flashdance. All I want to do is Flashdance. Don't you mean Footloose?*

Carver spun, dancing naked to the tune of "I Was Made for Loving You."

"Carver, my love, what are you doing?"

Taking Tiffany's hand—which he hoped would be entwined with his for eternity—Carver led her to the magnificent fountain at the centre of Calm Bay Park, where they were enveloped in a mist of love.

With his heart pounding, Carver dropped to one knee, eliciting tears from Tiffany's eyes. Seventeen feet away, Sam watched the scene unfold from a park bench while a crowd assembled around them.

In his ecstatic joy, Carver gazed deeply into Tiffany's eyes. "Tiffany, my dear, I envision us together until we're nothing but stone, our hands cold, yet our love eternal. Tiffany, I have practiced this proposal in the mirror, and I would be the happiest man—if not a man-boy—alive if you were my loving, doting wife. Will you marry me?"

Tiffany's "YES" set the crowd of onlookers alight with excitement, heralding the rise of a new royal pair within Sleeping Seagull's societal ranks.

Promptly, Sam whisked Carver and Tiffany into "Two Scoops," where the custom was for newly betrothed couples to enjoy two scoops of Jerry Garcia ice cream—a bizarre tradition enshrined in the town's law three decades prior.

With a lick and a kiss, their ritual was interrupted by Sam's misplaced kiss.

"Sam, why are you kissing us?"

"Sorry, Carver, but today marks the beginning of the most epic stag parties ever once you've had that last lick!" Which didn't explain the kissing.

After the final slurp of ice cream, Sam and Carver dashed out the back door, ready for a day of drunken debauchery, leaving Tiffany wrapped in tears of happiness.

Tiffany turned to leave, only to be surprised by Carver's sudden re-entrance through the front door. "Carver, aren't you supposed to be out celebrating with your friends?"

"Yes, Tiffany, my little butterfly," he said. "But I can't bear to be away from you—not for a second. Sam will take my place at the stag party. I've planned a day just for us that will immortalize our love."

"Okay."

"I adore the succinctness of your words, my Mariposa."

Taking her hand once more, Carver led Tiffany back into the sultry light of day.



The cars roared, colliding explosively, and the Burt's Bail Bondsman vehicle was hurled into the air before crashing down, stirring up a massive cloud of dust near Carver and Tiffany's box seats at the Sleeping Seagull Demolition Derby Park.

Tiffany grimaced, swirling her lukewarm IPA as the rising bile soured her mouth. She eyed her sauerkraut-covered hot dog, now dusted with debris. With a bite, she recoiled. The day's, this, disgusting event overwhelmed her.

44

Later, Carver and Tiffany made love in their box seats, unaware of a stranger in the cheap seats recording them. Finished, Carver whispered tenderly, "I love you, Pappion."

But the name hung in the air, leaving Tiffany questioning. Am I Pappion?

... ..

**N**ext, Carver took Tiffany on a skydiving adventure. Afterward, they made love again. This time, Tiffany kept her clothes on, and once they finished, Carver leaned in and whispered with a snort, “I love you, Schmetterling?”

45

*What does that mean? Tiffany thought.*

... ..

“ Tiffany, this final adventure will cement our love for eternity,” Carver said, as they donned their diving gear. They plunged into the ocean’s fury, and within three minutes, a shark ferociously attacked a seal, sealing its doom as Tiffany watched in horror, the once tranquil Calm Bay churning with the lifeblood of its prey.

Later, they reclined on the rugged terrain of Rocky Point, a stretch of shore strewn more with stones than sand, and there they made love again. Their passion was once more fulfilled as they drank deeply from the boxed wine’s spigot.

Lying side by side, Carver turned to Tiffany, his gaze intense and loving, and slurred through a mouthful of warm Chardonnay, “I love you,” followed by an affectionate burp, “Nabi.”

A chilling transformation overtook Tiffany’s hands as they grew ice cold, petrifying like stone – a precursor to Carver that their love would endure eternally, side by side, even beyond death.

In his heart, Carver was sure: his plan had unfolded flawlessly.

... ..

**A**cross town, Carver was at his ninth stop for the evening, a risqué establishment aptly named “Stripper Pole.” His friends had arranged for a lap dance, but Carver, ever the gentleman, uncomfortably directed his gaze to the bar’s giant TV. A news segment aired, reporting how Calm Bay had mysteriously turned red.

... ..

Back at Calm Bay, having returned to the docks, Carver spoke the word “Butterfly” to Tiffany in seven different languages. He then asked if she would mind walking home, as he had errands. He needed to accompany Raoul to Costco to develop film for his digital camera—an odd and anachronistic task.

As Carver and Raoul left, Tiffany watched them bounce and whispered, “Reginald?” to herself, her expression one of puzzled concern.

... ..

9

PROSE

48

Trouble in (Paradise) Sleeping Seagull

## Prose: Trouble in (Paradise) Sleeping Seagull

**R**ing. Ring.

"Hello? Sam speaking."

"Sam, it's Tiff. I've messed up, I've ruined my whole life. I... I... I..."

"Calm down, Tiffany. What's happened?"

"Please, just come over. Now. I don't know what to do."

Knock. Knock.

"Hi. Who's there?"

"It's me, Sam. You called me over."

"How did you get here so quickly?"

"I live next door, remember?"

"Oh, right."

"Come in, Sam. It's... it's all over."

"What's over?"

"My life. Everything."

"Slow down. What exactly is over? What's everything?"

Tiffany thrusts her right hand from behind her back in front of Sam's face, showing a pair of soiled socks.

"This."

"You're upset... over socks?"

"No, sorry, wrong hand." Switching hands, she presents Sam with a pregnancy test.

"Look at this."

"You've got two pink lines there."

"You can say that again. I took 84 pregnancy tests. See how vivid the colour is?"

"You spent over \$1,200 on tests?"

"Wait, how do you know the cost?"

"I had a scare. But forget that. The point is, you'll be an amazing mom, the best that Sleeping Seagull has ever seen! But why are you crying?"

"How do I tell Carver?"

Tiffany rushes to the bathroom to puke.

“What if he doesn’t want a baby?”

“He will. To him, you’re everything.”

“That’s just it; after his bachelor party, which he didn’t attend, it took him three days to recover. I couldn’t figure it out; we weren’t even that wild at the Demolition Derby, skydiving, and deep-sea diving, which was odd events to take me to because he knows I hate them. Then it hit me... Reginald.”

“Reginald? What does he have to do with this?”

### **At the Obstetrician’s Office Later That Day.**

“Tiffany, this gel will be cold. Ready to see your baby?” Dr. Wright exclaims. “Oh, my.”

Sam grasps Tiffany’s hands.

“What is it, Doctor Wright?”

On the screen, two tiny hearts pulse.

“You’re having twins, Tiffany! And they look healthy. Let’s confirm with some tests.”

After the tests, Doctor Wright looks astonished. “Both babies are perfectly healthy. But you should sit.”

“We’re sitting.”

“You might want to sit more firmly. You have what’s called Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious – I mean Heteropaternal Superfecundation.”

“What does that mean?”

“In simpler terms, each of your babies has a different father.”

Sam faints.

“What?”

“One twin’s father is Carver, and the other’s is Reginald.”

Tiffany revives Sam with a slap, and then, starts crying.

“What do I do? How do I tell Carver?”

Below her, the doctor's labradoodle, Sommerfugl (Norwegian for butterfly) starts lapping at a forming puddle of Tiffany's tears.

**Sam:** Carver loves you. He'll understand.

**Tiffany:** It's over. When he returns home and I tell him, he will leave me. He will never understand. How could he? You do remember Carver's complicated family history. Both of his parents were twins. As a teenager, he found out the woman he thought was his birth mother, Madison, wasn't his biological mother. His real mother was Madison's twin sister, Lucy, who had had a secret affair with...

**Sam:** With...?

**Tiffany:** Lucy had been cheating on her husband, Roy, with Roger – the identical twin brother of Carver's father. This means...

**Sam:** ... Carver's mother is his uncle Roy's wife. His aunt Lucy is his biological mother, and his dad is his dad. Well, his dad is both his uncle and his father? I'm confused. Who did Madison give birth to then?

**Tiffany:** That's not our primary concern right now. My life is over. Carver is going to be devastated.

**Sam:** I don't understand. Tiffany: How could anyone?

**Readers:** We're confused.

**Tiffany:** You should be. [Sam and Tiffany both vomit.] Madison gave birth to Carver. Then, during a power outage, she was quickly ushered out of the delivery room. In the ensuing chaos, just before the hospital's emergency generators kicked in, Lucy gave birth to Reginald in secret, merely seven minutes after Carver was born. A baby surrounded by mystery.

• • • • •

**T**he Verdict is In

This is the most unique and troublesome situation in Romantic Comedy History.

The Academy Award and, ironically, the Lifetime Achievement Award for "Unique Troublesome Situation in Romantic Comedy History" goes to "Madly. Truly. Deeply."

The auditorium's crowd bursts into thunderous applause.

• • • • •



10  
PROSE  
40 Weeks

52

## Prose: 40 Weeks

**B**efore I rant – I mean narrate; I want to address ‘The Elephant on These Pages’ – I don’t sleep well? That’s not it. Dumbo? No. Yes, now he is on these pages.

The Elephant is...

While I try to focus, The Postman and Mark are engaged in a trivial exchange about their watches. “Nice watch.” “Yours too.”

Meanwhile, 2G feels ignored and, looking up from his phone with a veneer of indifference, interjects, “I’ve got six watches at home in a drawer,” before returning to his silent contemplation.

Dumbo is the only elephant name I know. Is Okja an elephant?

Usain Bolt blast past, he’s being chased by a giant Kafkaesque cockroach and Hondo from S.W.A.T... The cockroach is doing fartlek training.

A capoeira artist performs a spinning kick. The Mayor?

Now, about the aforementioned ‘elephant’ – how could Carver and Reginald be twins if they were born to different mothers?

Exactly.

In truth, Carver and Reginald would be only half-twin-identical-brothers, or should we call them half-twin-identical-cousins? Is that a real thing? It is now.

So, who did Carver absorb in the womb. Triplets? No, his actual twin – Reginald had a womb of his own. What’s his/her name?

Wouldn’t you like to know?

Not really.

Can I have the bedside table?

Sure.

Now that I have addressed ‘The Elephant on These Pages...’

Have you?

Quit interrupting – I will continue...

## 40 Weeks

Carver invited Tiffany to meet him at The Sleeping Seagull Café the next day.

“Tiffany, my dear, I’m sorry, but the wedding is off.”

Tiffany trembled violently, akin to the most severe earthquake – a magnitude 9. Her sobs were like an unstoppable force, flooding the surrounding tables with a tsunami of tears.

“No. I love you; it wasn’t my fault. How could I have known?”

“You knew I had left.”

“But you returned.”

“Reginald isn’t even my twin.”

“Look in the mirror.”

“Tiffany, my decision is firm for the moment. My love for you surpasses the way stars illuminate the sky.”

“I don’t think stars are capable of love.”

“My love for you is overwhelming, Tiffany, but now, when I see your face, I can’t help but envision you with Reginald – and that’s something I can’t endure. I need time to sort through my feelings.”

“Noooo.”

“I must take time to determine if I can move past this – I need distance.”

“What about our child?”

“I’ll be present for our baby, but for the present, Sam will step in for me...”

Over the next 40 weeks, Sam stayed by Tiffany’s side, faithfully attending their weekly Lamaze classes – which should not be mistaken for lectures on llamas – and certainly not to be mixed up with the feeble attempt at humour in this paragraph.

He also joined her for daily brunch, organized a grand baby shower for her, and consistently protected her from Reginald’s uninvited declarations of love.

Every week, as if on cue, Reginald would disrupt the Lamaze class in order to express his undying feelings for Tiffany, only for Sam to promptly escort him out with a firm kick. The reason for such vigilance was clear: Tiffany’s heart belonged to Carver alone.

Ironically, it’s said to be risky to stand behind a llama.

Every day of Tiffany’s pregnancy, Sam assured her one-day Carver would return to her, pleading for her forgiveness and for her to take him back. Without Sam, Tiffany surely would have imploded.

Every day, Carver lingered on the outskirts, shrouded in secrecy. Despite his need to reflect, his yearning for Tiffany was something he couldn't suppress.

In Tiffany's last trimester of pregnancy, I would have used a specific number for the trimester, but I did not feel like looking it up. What is the last trimester? I don't care.

It's three.

I said I didn't care.

You should; readers can be finicky.

I don't care.

In a completely different vein, the image of David Sedaris in conversation with Seth Meyers played in a small window on the top right corner of my computer screen. I wonder how many watches he has in a drawer?

Meanwhile, Carver summoned Reginald to The Sleeping Seagull Café, setting the stage for an inevitable confrontation.

55

After striking Reginald in the solar plexus and helping him off the café floor, he declared firmly, "Reg, your actions are despicable, contemptible – simply revolting – yet you are my identical-twin-half-cousin-half-twin-brother, and I love you as such. Despite your faults, I treasure Tiffany, who is pregnant with both your child and mine. I demand that you step back – I vow to maintain your presence in our lives when the twins arrive; we will acknowledge you as one of their fathers', ensuring your role in Tiffany's and the babies' lives. However, if you persist in your depraved, parasitic behaviour, I will put an end to you. Withdraw now or prepare to face severe consequences. Allow Tiffany and my broken bond to mend. I desire her hand in marriage, but that can't happen with you praying on us. Leave and return only on the delivery day when I permit you to support Tiffany in the birthing room as she brings our beautiful twins into this world."

... ..

28 February 2028

Tiffany's water broke.

Sam rushed her to the hospital.

Carver and Reginald were alerted by their phones and immediately headed for the hospital. Reginald, after collecting Carver, pushed the Prius to its limits. The car flipped over three times, miraculously landing upright, allowing them to continue unharmed. During the chaos, the passenger side airbag burst open, inexplicably showering them with buttery popcorn. Adding to the bizarre situation was the appearance of the Domino's Pizza Noid, comfortably seated next to Carver, oddly enjoying the popcorn. They reached the delivery room swiftly, leaving the Noid and the popcorn-filled vehicle behind to join Sam who awaited them at the entrance to the delivery room.

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"Push. Push. One last push, Tiffany."

At precisely 11:55 PM, Tiffany birthed a beautiful baby boy, later to be named Samson, with Carver, the proud baby's father, fainting and collapsing to the floor.

Seven minutes later, at 12:02 AM, 29 February, Samson's twin sister, later named Samantha, was born, with Reginald, the proud baby father, lying on the floor next to his identical-twin-half-cousin-half-twin-brother Carver.

Tiffany and Sam laughed as Tiffany swaddled her newborns in her arms.

But wait. Three minutes later, Tiffany birthed a flat-packed IKEA bedside table.

"Tiffany," Sam whispered into her ears, "Carver loves you; I think the wedding is back on."

... ..

11

PROSE

Grand Gesture

57

## Prose: Grand Gesture

In the enchanted realm of Sleeping Seagull, where the sea's murmur was laden with secrets and the winds whispered of passions and treacheries, there resided a brave knight named Sir Carver. His heart, a captive of yearning, throbbed for the sight of the lovely Lady Tiffany – an ethereal beauty ensnared by the shadowy spells cast by his twin, the sorcerer Reginald.

For forty painstaking weeks, Sir Carver roamed the verdant, enigmatic woodlands of Sleeping Seagull. Each step was a meditation on the sorrowful saga that had rented their destinies asunder. Though he could empathize with Reginald's yearnings, for their blood was shared, the knife of betrayal cut too deep for absolution.

"Perchance it was the mark – the one mimicking the grand African continent, proudly bearing its fifty-four mystical provinces upon his skin – that might have unravelled the deception for her," pondered Sam, the sage and stalwart companion pacing alongside Carver.

"Tiffany's love is sightless, a pure force," Carver exhaled deeply, his spirit of forgiveness as boundless as the skies above. "Her heart, I must reclaim. Does redemption await in her gaze?"

"Sure, as the day turns to night," assured Sam with a twinkle of insight in his gaze, "a grand overture will beckon her soul to thine."

Their thoughts were momentarily distracted as the realm's swiftest, Usain Bolt, danced by with the wind.

Carver contemplated the gesture majestic enough to capture Tiffany's heart anew.

"A celestial picnic, a poem wrought 'neath the wax and wane of the moon, a tasting at the famed Sleeping Seagull Winery, or a rose garden where love blooms eternal," mused Sam, ever the wellspring of romance.

"Yet, unbeknownst to all, these past weeks, I've secretly toiled," Carver confided with a rising crescendo of pride, "constructing our castle of sweet reverie by the serene embrace of Calm Bay. A nursery so grand, it would eclipse the Fairy Queen's very own chambers – a magnum opus of devotion."

Sam's eyes widened like moons in revelation. "A castle? A nursery designed for the heirs of your heart?"

“Indeed, a haven of whimsy,” Carver confirmed, guiding Sam towards the castellated dream. With a flourish, the imposing doors yielded to unveil a nursery unparalleled – there stood a grand mural of the Eiffel Tower, a picturesque stream teeming with kaleidoscopic koi, duelling petting zoos: one home to downy animals, the other filled with creatures of enchantment – additionally, a court for the spirited matches of pickle ball, while overhead, a canopy of stars shimmered, harmonious with the dulcet tones of Raffi recasting Ed Sheeran’s melodies.

“Marvel at our world-exclusive potion boutique, dispensers of mirth and giggles, ever vigilant,” Carver bragged, gesturing to the twin Labradoodles perched like sentinels beside the cribs of myth.

“Most splendid,” Sam agreed with a nod.

Sam escorted Lady Tiffany to the hidden domicile as dusk draped Sleeping Seagull “Venture with me into this sanctum of miracles,” Sam enticed.

“To whom does this marvel belong?” inquired Tiffany, bewitched by curiosity.

“This abode, eternally yours, is woven from strands of love and dreams,” proclaimed Sam.

“Here lies the canvas for your endless ‘ever-after.’”

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Within, Carver knelt, vulnerability his mantle, while minstrels serenaded with a ballad of deathless love.

A stream of tears graced Tiffany’s visage – a testament to her resounding joy. “Would you crown yourself, my queen anew, that we may sculpt a kingdom in our fortress of fancies?” Carver proposed, voice quivering with a cocktail of fear and hope.

“Yes,” breathed Tiffany, her essence taking flight. Raffi, now accompanied by Ezra, serenaded with a chorus Ed Sheeran infused love songs.

Accordingly, the nuptials were decreed for the sixteenth of July amidst a swell of jubilant hearts.

The Enchanted Sleeping Seagull sang with glee, for love had vanquished the shadows, and the legends of Sir Carver and Lady Tiffany were to be extolled through the ages – with Sam bestowed the dual honour of the best man and the valiant maiden of honour.

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12

PROSE

The Wedding

60

## Prose: The Wedding

16 July 2028

The day was picture-perfect, with a postcard-worthy sky. Fluffy, wispy clouds danced around the sun at 23 degrees Celsius, which converts to 73.4 Fahrenheit for our American friends.

A gentle breeze ensured that everyone in Sleeping Seagull stayed refreshed and cool. Carver's memories spanned from hate to love, love to lust, and lust to truth. That linear journey of emotions connected him to Tiffany and empowered him to support her in letting go. *Ed Sheeran clapped*. They had overcome Reginald's malevolence and even found it in their hearts to forgive him.

Reginald was no longer in the frame; he rekindled his relationship with Courtney, and their all-consuming karaoke pursuits left them no time to interfere in Tiffany's life. And with Courtney expecting Reginald's twins, the pair had no interest in dragging Tiffany into their new domestic dilemma. The resolution had led to a celebration: a combined wedding was in order.

Sam juggled dual roles to maintain the peace, as he played the best man for Carver and the maid of honour for Tiffany. He was a sartorial symbol of support – clad in half tuxedo, half bridal gown.

How did he keep them calm?

He microdosed both of them with psilocybin. Spelled incorrectly. Go back. Fixed.

Describe the setting.

Every flower in the tri-area-area had been harvested and now adorned the bandstand sitting at the bottom of the 11,000-seat amphitheatre – which was packed to the, since it is outdoors, to capacity. I was going to say rafters, but because it was outdoors...

Describe what the bride and groom were wearing.

No.

Why not?

I'm not an especially talented narrator, and furthermore, I have no desire to describe clothing.

Please?

No.

With the dual ceremony imminent, a cavalcade of cars, vans, and buses crested the horizon, carrying an eclectic assortment of individuals: Amos Calloway, Karl the Giant, Norther Winslow, Older Jenny, Mr. Soggybottom, Ping, and Jing; as well as Mayor Beamen from Spectre. These characters, lifted from one of the narrator's favourite films, *Big Fish*—starring Ewan McGregor and directed by Tim Burton—were as beloved to them as those from another one of his favourites, *Grand Canyon*.

Both Tim and Ewan were in attendance—Ewan is especially worthy of his name being dropped because he is a real-life friend of the narrator's friend William.

Why were these characters here?

They had intended to honour the late Edward Bloom and followed directions to what they thought was his memorial service. However, a mistake on the highway led them to *Sleeping Seagull*, where a different celebration of life was underway—not the one for Sir Edward Bloom as depicted in the film.

Will (played by Billy Crudup), Edward's son, felt a surge of astonishment. On his deathbed, Edward (Ewan) had shared tales of the very individuals present, and Will had an epiphany. He now realized his father's capacity for love; Edward had a way of magnifying everyone's existence, casting each person he met as the protagonist of their own story. This was Edward's enduring gift—a lesson in embracing the significance of every life.

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Meanwhile, over by *The Sleeping Seagull Coliseum* (directly across the street).

Kevin Kline's car breaks down. He enters a bodega, which might mean a convenience store, though it likely encompasses more.

Afterward, Kevin stands by his stranded vehicle, awaiting a tow. As he waits, gang members circle the block in their car, menacingly scoping him out before finally pulling up, ready to intimidate or worse.

At that critical moment, Danny Glover arrives in a tow truck and comments on the injustice of such a world gone awry.

The gang leader confronts Glover with a gun, but Glover remains composed, insisting he's only there to do his job.

The gang leader questions if Glover's request to work in peace is based on respect or the fact that he's under threat of a gun.

Glover plainly states that without the gun, there would be no dialogue at all.

The gang leader smirks, concluding that respect only comes with force, then gestures to his cohorts, and they depart.

**The message is clear:** the Grand Canyon took eons to form.

**K**evin, Danny, and their gang friends are gathered in the amphitheatre, enticed by the promise of a spread featuring cold cuts, buns, and cheeses available during the reception break later that evening. They are all fond of salami.

Before we get to the reception, the ceremony is about to commence.

Dr. Wright, the wedding officiator, stands at the podium. Reginald and Courtney are the first to approach, both looking sharp in their disposable fast-fashion attire. Suddenly, Usain Bolt dashes past, pursued closely by a centenarian woman and a gender-non-specific leaf.

Dr. Wright: “Yada. Yada. Do you, Courtney? Do you, Reginald?” He looks over at the two – they are making out. After the “I dos,” he barks.

Reginald and Courtney shouted, “Sure” in unison, then returned to passionately kissing – French style.

The crowd erupts.

The Royal Couple steps onto the stage Tiffany was escorted by Jeremy, Sam flanks their sides, along with their cute as button twins, Samson and Samantha sucking of pacifiers as they sat in their strollers.

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Dr. Wright: Tiffany, do you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband?

Tiffany: I do.

Dr. Wright: And Carver Kai Liam Noah Rowan Unique Apollo Petra Luca Aria Asher Fergus, do you take Tiffany to be your lawful wedded wife?

Carver Kai Liam Noah Rowan Unique Apollo Petra Luca Aria Asher Fergus: I have written vows. “Tiffany, my perfect angel, from the moment I looked into your eyes that first day on Rodney’s Burger Shack patio, as you stood dripping with stank curb water, with Sam beside you marinating inside the pages of ‘DEEPLY. MADLY. TRULY.,’ I knew I had found my home, resting in your eyes,” I do.

*Ed Sheeran stands and claps.*

**Dr. Wright:** I now pronounce you man and wife. You may kiss the bride.

As Carver + Tiffany were engaged in the kiss, Raoul lay rose petals on a blanket overlooking Calm Bay, with two bowls of clear soup placed to the side.

The End.

Happily, ever after!

by Lindsay Wincherauk

Unfortunately for Ezra, as he crossed the road to the reception, he was struck by the force of a freight train by Hondo, who desperately needed someone to tackle. The readers gasp.

This scene echoes the overused cinematic cliché of a character being blindsided by a bus or truck—a trope that likely feels out of place here indubitably.

The Academy Award for “The Most Twisted Nonsensical Rom-Com Ending in Rom-Com History,” goes to “Deeply. Madly. Truly.”

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Tiffany’s dress was a pristine white taffeta, a fabric that, ironically, Courtney and Reginald chose as the names for both of their twins.

Thus concludes the first Rom-Com I’ve ever written. How did I do?  
I’ll wait over→ [HERE](#) for your response.

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PROSE

Sam's Review

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## Prose: Sam's Review

17 July 2028

**W**hen Sam awoke, his head was still spinning, trapped in an Absinthe-fuelled fog. He found himself adhering to the back page of “Madly. Truly. Deeply.”

It was time for him to return home or move onto the next parchment he would become a part of. Sitting in a chair in his office was Van Gogh, his left ear bleeding.

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Sam had an intuitive feeling that his time at Sleeping Seagull would soon end. Rising from the page he had been stuck to, he settled into his desk chair, ready to write his review. To his left, a steaming cup of French Roast awaited, from which he took a sip, only to burn his tongue.

## Sam's Review: Madly. Truly. Deeply.

Ladies, gentlemen, and book enthusiasts of all dimensions, buckle up for the literary equivalent of a triple-loop rollercoaster ride through the cosmos—introducing “Madly. Truly. Deeply.,” the book that’s so good, it doesn’t even need an author’s name on the cover. It’s like Banksy decided to write a novel, and we’re all just living in it.

From the moment you crack open this inscrutable tome, you’ll be whisked away on a Kafkaesque journey that’s part Kaufman, part carnival ride, and entirely off the rails. Each page is a portal to a realm where whimsy reigns supreme, and logic takes a well-deserved vacation.

Our hero, the endearing sidekick Sam, is so charmingly crafted that you’ll find yourself checking your own pages to make sure he hasn’t leapt off to steal your snacks. He’s the Robin to your Batman, the Chewbacca to your Han Solo, the Watson to your Sherlock—only with more heart-stealing and less crime-solving.

If I were to rate this book using the conventional star system, I’d quickly run out of stars. We’re talking about a celestial rating here, folks—imagine every star in the night sky, then multiply it by infinity, carry the one, and you’re still not even close. It’s that good.

And let me tell you about the page-stealing Sam. This character is so vividly written, so utterly compelling, I’m half-convinced he’s a doppelganger of myself. Yes, dear reader, in a plot twist no one saw coming, I am the real-life inspiration for Sam.

(Disclaimer: This claim has not been verified by anyone, anywhere, at any time.)

In conclusion, “Madly. Truly. Deeply.” is not just the best Rom-Com ever penned—it’s a love letter to the absurd, a sonnet to the surreal, and a high-five to hilarity. So, if you’re looking for a book that will spin your head with joy, love, and a touch of existential delight, look no further. Just don’t blame me when you start seeing Sams everywhere—it’s a side effect of greatness.



As Sam typed the word “myself,” he reached for his coffee. No longer steaming, the drink had turned tepid. He downed it in one gulp, closed his eyes, and suddenly Van Gogh was tugging at his hand.

A flash of light illuminated Sam’s office just as the lukewarm liquid slid down his throat.

**POOF.** In an instant, he had vanished. When Sam’s eyes fluttered open, he found himself on 16 July 1960, sitting outside a dimly lit room. Two nuns passed by, carrying a lifeless infant.

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As Sam’s vision cleared of phosphenes, he noticed a card dealer near the room. Peering inside, he saw a newborn baby crying quietly and alone in the corner.

The dealer laid out five cards: the 2 of clubs, 3 of spades, 4 of hearts, 5 of diamonds, and the Queen of SPADES.

Sam understood he had arrived at his next assignment, a journey through a memoir titled “Lindsay.”

Meanwhile, Van Gogh poured them each two fingers of Absinthe.

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1

PROSE

The Memoir

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Lindsay – The Memoir

The Delivery Room

1

Prose – The Memoir: Lindsay – The Memoir: The Delivery Room

Gazing into the sterile chamber, a pang of tenderness tightened Sam's chest as he observed the infant – so innocent and solitary, cradled by the stark white of his surroundings.

“Oh, look at him in there, so adorably helpless and all alone. The hand he's been dealt” – Sam muttered with a heavy heart – “This precious soul will need a wealth of guidance to navigate the treacherous waters of life,” he whispered to the vacant corridor, its shadows clinging to the sorrow permeating this forsaken institution.

Questions clouded Sam's mind as he contemplated his urgent responsibilities. Where is this child's family? Why has he been abandoned in such a cold, desolate place? And what of the unsettling sight of the nuns, their faces etched with solemnity as they carried another lifeless body across the corridor, a sight that had shaken Sam to his very foundation – these queries swirled within Sam, cloaked in the silence imposed by seemingly accepted societal norms.

Unseen as he meandered through the gloom-filled air, Sam questioned the peculiar sensation of weightlessness. Unbeknownst to him, his presence in this narrative took on an ethereal form – a shadowy being unbound by the shackles of flesh and bone. Sam glided towards the door as the infant wailed, a primal acknowledgment of solitude. His attempt to grasp the handle was futile, his hand dissolving through the solid wood, revealing a ghostly virtue – his newfound ability to traverse barriers, both seen and unseen, unnoticed by the living.

*The infant's cries grew urgent, a silent plea in the sterile stillness: Who's here? Mother? Father? Caregiver? My consciousness is barely formed, yet I know of words; I feel the absence. Who lingers in the shadows? Where has everyone vanished to? Why am I cast aside in this place?*

Now imbued with an unexpected influence, Sam answered without parting his spectral lips, his voice a mere ripple in the air.

To the bewildered child, he conveyed his purpose: a guardian meant to shepherd him through the maze of life's injustices. This was not the time to expose the vile secrets of their surroundings. Instead, he soothed the unnamed infant with a silent vow; he would forever be his guard, an unseen mentor to assist him in deciphering the grotesque realities to which the child had been unfairly subjected.

**T**hough newly thrust into existence, the infant sensed the comfort in Sam's assurances and implored him for a solemn vow—never to depart from his vulnerable existence.

Sam earnestly consented, pledging to be the steadfast beacon until the child had acquired a repertoire of mental armaments, enough to confront the unpredictable storms that life might unleash upon him.

Thus, was forged a pact within the ethereal plane. Sam, the unwavering sentinel, and his earthly charge, would twine their fates, traversing existence with a promise of unwavering support, empathy, and the courage to conquer, despite the dreadful hand already played.

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## PROSE COMING GENRES

2. Children's Book
3. Thriller (Meets Paige, formerly known as Taylor)
4. Self Help
5. Fantasy
6. LBGTQ
7. Graphic Novel

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