



Lindsay Wincherauk

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I needed a day off from The Asylum. So, I made an adult-like decision and took one. I've been feeling like my life clock is winding down again. I'm missing J immensely. What do I mean by my life clock winding down, you ask?

The floating feeling has returned; it had vacated my walks for a few days, maybe a week, but now it's back with a vengeance. It feels like my being has been put in a garlic press and is being squeezed and squeezed, and the last ounce of juice is dripping out of me. I am scared. My life is being boarded up like a neighbourhood in disrepair being taken over by squatters.

I walk. I stumble right, then left. I need to eat more nutritiously, but unfortunately, depression and looming poverty comes with the addiction of a propensity for poor food choices.

I keep walking. I start crying. I'm almost 63 and I'm walking down the street crying.

Some people see the tears leaking from my eyes as weakness, something to be used against me.

Gun?

A homeless man is zigzagging through an intersection carrying a massive bag full of cans. Rattle. Rattle. I glance at him.

What the fuck are you staring at? He barks at me.

If I wasn't floaty, I might have replied, fuck off.

I don't.

I wouldn't.

I've matured.

I'm happy I'm not him, at least not yet; and the one thing the news has taught me is to be scared of everyone and whatever you do: DO. NOT. ENGAGE. Or you may be assaulted. I remain silent.

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I'm now on the seawall. Another glorious day has swallowed the city in warmth and sun. The people walking behind me seem to be on a first date. Their words dance in the air.

Do you want to do twenty questions? The female of the two asks.

Sure, the male of the two says.

Do you have a preference?

Looooooooong Pause

No.

I chuckle. What a bold first question, followed by a blatant lie; he wants to get laid.

I need to calm my stress down.

FH

I plop down beside the Mayor. The Golden State Warriors versus Sacramento Kings, Game 7, basketball game is on the tube. I'm cheering for GS, not cheering, but I prefer if they'd win.

I ask the Mayor, who he cheers for.

| Inaudible |

I need to relax.

I'm accosted by a couple to my right. Let's call them Jack + Dianne (names changed). A little ditty.

Jack is boisterous, past his prime. Loud.

I need to relax.

No.

Who are you cheering for? Jack bellows at me.

GS.

Great, my wife, Dianne, is a huge GS fan.

I remain silent.

I used to be a huge Toronto Raptors fan? Jack says.

What happened? Did you lose some weight? I ask him.

He stares at me blankly.

The Mayor chuckles.

Jack becomes increasingly boisterous.

My wife started a "Fuck Canada" chant in Toronto at Raptors versus Golden State Game once. That game cost me \$60,000.

Dianne says, no, it didn't.

\$20,000 each for the tickets, Jack says.

Dianne nods.

The boasting is tiring.

You look fit, Jack says.

I try.

How old are you? I'm 45, Jack says. Are you the same age as me?

No.

How old?

I tell him.

You're an old man, Jack says.

Sure.

Is the man (the Mayor) next to you, your best friend, or your father?

Mayor, are you, my father?

I could be, the Mayor says.

Both of you are so old, Jack says.

I'm tired. I'm not enjoying this conversation.

Jack starts talking about the athletic brilliance of the basketball players.

I agree. Calculating shots in your head is impressive, something most people wouldn't understand.

I look at the Mayor and say it's like when I threw the longest touchdown pass; I had to calculate the distance of the throw and the speed the receiver and defender were running and thread the perfect pass to the receiver.

The Mayor suggests he could be my father. I think he's trying to take credit for the pass.

Jack asks what I said to the Mayor.

I tell him about throwing the longest touchdown pass in junior football history.

Jack opens the floodgates. Glory days.

He was a 'rush-end' at Queens University.

He tried out for a major university in the US. More glory days.

He now respects me.

Dianne wants to go to Palm Springs because she likes Frank Sinatra.

More glory days — Jack and I are now friends for the day.

Jack reminds me of—

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I used to work for a man named Darren. Darren used to be a hockey player. He was okay, had some notoriety, enough to have many lame hanger-on friends hanging on. Darren's problem with his hockey pursuits is that no matter how many steroids he injected or how much cocaine he snorted, he was never going to grow taller to become anything more than another glory day failed hockey player unable to escape his marginality. Darren's ego helped him suck sycophants into his life but significantly stunted his development as a person.

Darren kept doing cocaine. Kept doing roids. Kept being the cowardly failed hockey player he was. Darren was directionless... until he tripped into construction, the industry of modern-day slavery. Maybe it's always been that way.

Darren stumbled through life with blinders on, with everyone Darren went into business with ending their relationships in litigation. So, you see, failure begets failure.

The thing is, Darren succeeded through no skill of his own. He got lucky with timing. The government in the jurisdiction his slave business was in, was in the process of selling its soul to builders and developers, turning the industry into an employers' wonderland as the city and province became thirsty for foreign investment.

In the 1980s, a civic worker cutting grass in the summers could earn enough to purchase a home for less than \$50,000 and a vehicle, for less than \$5,000 on his/her \$13-\$15 per hour wage. But when the dust settled after the selling of the city's soul (starting with Expo 86), things changed, and by the time Darren was running a company, workers made approximately \$9.00 per hour, and a car was now more than \$60,000 for a decent one.

A man walks by carrying a bag of cans, and Darren asks him if he wants a fucking job.

The Darren's of this world is part of a much larger problem, playing a major role in the suffering we see on the streets. Exacerbating it more by not taking any responsibility for the pain and suffering they've created.

As more and more people fell through societies cracks with their suffering intensifying, Darren plied prospects and clients with booze, strippers, and cocaine. He had no other skills, and was still partaking in these vices himself, and he continued surrounding himself with people he were easy to exploit. Darren was alpha amongst his friends, many of whom came from affluent families. Both Tyler, and Todd have rich

fathers and were pawns for Darren's grift. It's unfathomable Todd and Tyler were so vulnerable, susceptible to Darren's exploitive ways by Darren simply by buttering them up with the belief Darren was bringing them into his company because of their skills and not who their fathers were.

Tyler wasn't even Darren's first choice. Greed has away of making people gay for money and validation.

And like dominoes, they fell for his grift.

Darren got lucky. He had people in the wings who saved his company from his ineptitude and lack of business acumen, *which only consisted of a line of cocaine or a bottle of booze*, people in the wings with a smidgen of life experience who understood booze and cocaine had a limited audience.

But somehow, in his paranoid delusion, Darren believed he had built an empire. An empire where Darren tried to portray an image of success through excess.

But somehow, with the odds stacked in his favour, and the government on his side, the covers are beginning to come off the grift. With the industry booming, Darren's business is starting to fail magnificently, and unfortunately the fathers of his easy to manipulate friends and now, business associates, well, since Tyler + Todd's fathers are actually successful business people, they easily saw through Darren's manipulative ways.

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[Back at the FH](#)

I made my fortune being a professional athlete, Jack says.

You played pro? I ask. What sport?

Not pro; I didn't play pro, but you get it; I played at a high level. You understand; you get it.

I don't.

My wife would like to fuck the coach of GS.

It's incredible what people are capable of sharing. Even if...

Who just shot the three-pointer. Oh my, GS let their white guy shoot a three. Dianne says.

Oakland is dangerous; I was sexually assaulted there once? Jack states.

Rob sits next to the Mayor, and Rob starts talking about China.

I feel bad for the Mayor.

Jack calls us old again and then adds, you two probably spend your days wondering if

your mothers are alive.

I tell him I watched my mother die twice. I think he felt terrible about his awful question.

Dianne's ears perk up. She asks me my story. I share it. She has a moment of genuine empathy and tells me she is sorry for what I've gone through.

I get chills.

Dianne says it's horrible to see the suffering in parts of Africa.

I tell her we must never discount what anybody is going through – when we do, people suffering grow silent. Pain is not a competition.

Dianne nods.

I tell her it fucking sucks to have to carry the weight of family burdens with you throughout life; with few people understanding it's not something you'll ever get over.

Jack tells me they will not pay their eighteen-year-old son's desire to go to Barcelona.

Why is he telling me this?

He then tells me his son was conceived with his ex-girlfriend after fucking once in Numbers Gay Club nineteen years ago.

I'm not sure why Jack is sharing this.

He tells me she left him six months into the pregnancy.

Dianne says Jack is a good father.

I can see that in him.

I share some of my writing with the Mayor.

You're a writer, Jack and Dianne ask.

Jack says he's writing a play and asks for writing tips.

I share two that are essential.

1. Don't describe how someone looks too much; leave it for the reader to decide.
2. And don't be too flowery with descriptions. Everyone knows what things look like, so don't waste words describing an orange pylon, a chair, or anything—few writers can describe things without it becoming tedious. Few authors.

Daniel walks into the bar.

Daniel is a good-looking guy.

Daniel happens to be black.

Darren looks at the tube, says, SEE, and then glances Daniel's way.

Jack moves over to sit beside Daniel.

This is where the train running down the track starts falling off the rails.

I look at the Mayor and Rob, who still talk about China.

I turn back toward Jack + Daniel. Jack is assaulting Daniel with everything imaginable people who define themselves as white, think about black people. I won't share what I heard. Daniel is trapped. I think Jack, just because he likes basketball, believes what he is doing is okay. Daniel cringes; I can tell he wants to escape the assault.

I can't tell you how often I've heard older white guys tell me they don't understand basketball. When they do this, I say it's simple, the team that scores the most points wins.

Jack continues spewing racist vomit.

Daniel cringes.

Jack + Dianne leave, not before buying me a beer and shot.

At first, our connection stressed me because of their assault.

After a while, I felt lucky people are drawn to me occasionally.

Don't worry, I don't think I'm special, and I'm not boasting; the Jack's + Dianne's of the world probably talk to anyone, I get that, but to my credit, few people would be able to navigate the direction Jack + Dianne take conversations without running for the hills.

Are they awful people?

No, of course not, I understand noise has conditioned them to be who they are, just like everyone else. So, breaking the conditioning is a lifelong task. Not being racist is a lifelong task.

I appreciate Jack + Dianne. It's paramount we listen to the noise, it's the only way we can decide who we want to become.

Jack + Dianne leave.

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I wonder what it's like being the only black man in a bar full of Caucasians who think they are fucking white. I resist the urge to overcompensate and try to soften what Daniel had to endure from Jack.

I'm not sure what the right thing to do is? If I make a big deal about Jack's ignorance, am I no different from Jack?

I don't know.

I wonder if Daniel's conditioning has equipped him with the tools to get the train back on the rails and for him to see who is....

I'm 48% Norwegian.

I watched my mother die twice.

I watched my father die twice, once figuratively.

And last year, I was in contact with someone who may know who my "birth father" is... we bounced back communications for a few days, and then the trail went cold. I'm not sure what happened, but if I had to venture a guess, my queries may have come a little too close, to uncovering, the truth.

Do I want to know?

I don't know.

I will leave things here, today, yesterday, tomorrow – I hope tomorrow comes.

J returns on Friday.

Darren might be a criminal – without question, he is a failed hockey player and a grifter. He is somehow failing a business in an industry where all the cards are stacked in his favour.

And surprisingly, the fathers of those who are willfully being exploited will not bail Darren out.

Grammarly Readability Score = 83