



## A STORY

### LIFE ON THE SLUSH PILE: MY SISTER (?) IS DYING

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(Long Read - Heavy Subject Matter)



I'm only part of my family when people are dying. My last sister is dying. She's not eating or drinking; it's been eighteen days now. *I'm a fucking mess.* My mind has become littered with raging waves of sadness and depression because I don't know what I'm supposed to do, feel, or what her dying, selfishly, means, for me?

I grew up the youngest of seven. *I thought.*

But that turned out to be a *fucking* lie – to protect me – to protect me from, what?

I was never meant to find out who I am?

And I wouldn't have.

Except for, my birth certificate was slightly torn, requiring me to replace it to obtain a new passport. If the civil servant at the passport office hadn't noticed the tear, I'd likely have carried the secret with me to my grave, one day, hopefully, not too soon.

Anyway, I am not part of my family unless people are dying. And, my sister is not really my sister, unless, of course, the darkness in my family is pitch – and she really is

my sister, half.

*How do I know she is dying?*

One of my nieces, who is really a cousin, unless of course she's really a niece, phoned to tell me. Five years ago, I received a call from my family – another niece (?) called to tell me my mother, *who used to be a sister*, was dying – when the dust settles, she might turn out to be both. I jetted off to Calgary to be beside her deathbed. I said hello to her as my mother for the first time, and then goodbye. She died one week later. During the most prolonged visit of our fractured lives, she railed against the people in her life who weren't good to her. Like our father, my grandfather, unless of course – fade to dark?

With the news of my sister's (?) looming departure from earth, wave after wave after fucking wave of sadness, leaking into depression, is slamming into me. I've been through much in life, usually turning heartache into bearable comedy, but this time, laughter is eluding me. It is not part of my current lexicon. I shake. I want to cry; I can't find the tears.

*What to do?*

My niece told me my sister (?) has a phone in her palliative care room. I phoned the facility. I asked if it would be okay to talk to my sister (?). "Sure," was the answer. I told the care provider I'd try to find the strength the following day. I asked how my sister (?) was doing? I was informed I was "not" on the list, cementing that I'm not part of the family, not worthy, *a bastard whose birth brought shame*. You might think that is being overly dramatic: I was "not" on the list. The care provider did tell me my sister (?) hadn't eaten in eighteen days, she barely drinks anything, + she's under sixty pounds. I want to cry. I want to fucking hate her. *Am I a horrible person?*

The following day, I went to the fitness asylum. When I returned home, I made the call. I could hear my sister (?) on the other end when she was told I was on the line, say, "I couldn't be bothered."

*We did talk for a brief moment. I struggled with what to say. How are you? Take care? And all of the other quotidian banalities had been subtracted.*

I tried to offer warmth and comfort. I wanted to ask my sister (?) if she knew who my father is/was? She couldn't be bothered talking to me. I shook when I hung up; our goodbye had been reduced to nothingness.

*Do I call again?*

*Am I being selfish?*

The next call I get from the family will be to tell me she died. Try to imagine how that feels. *I hope you can't.*

I need to laugh. I want to cry. I don't want to burden those around me with my pain. I want to be me. I can't find myself; I'm lost.

A friend noticed I was off. *He kindly asked if I was, okay?*

I told him about the call to my sister.

Instead of just listening, he began to marginalize my upset by giving me a history of farm families (we weren't a farm family). My spirit began to be crushed by his words; my sister is, dying. I called her. And now, someone dared to minimize my emotions by *fucking* talking + explaining (?) things to me.

Telling me to "shut up" would've been kinder.

Not talking after, okay?

Would have been caring.

*What farm families are like...* well, I'm in pain.



Out of all the things in life tossed my way, a seemingly never-ending stream. I guess that is part of being a bastard child. Wait a minute, if my grandfather is really my – and my sister really is both sister and mom – I'm not sure what bastard turns into. *My head spins.*



The never-ending stream hit full flow back in 2016.

**2016**

My youngest niece died; I received the call.

My mother/sister/half-sister (?) became gravely ill, I received the call.

I travelled to be at her bedside; she died one week later; I received the call.

The following day my currently dying sister (?) called to tell me I might have to return to Calgary to sign the death certificate because I was the only next of kin. I had just fucking met my sister, who'd died, as my mother, the previous week. I trembled.

And then, just before Christmas, I received another call, my youngest sister (?) died.

## 2017

Let the floodwaters rage.

I was diagnosed with Sarcoidosis and put on a heavy regimen of pills (including chemo pills) to bring it under control. The drugs sort of worked, but they made everything taste like chalk. I never whined about it, not even once.

## 2018

The year kicked off with the levees bursting.

At the start of January, **STROKE**.

For two days at work, I felt as if I was going to collapse. I'd walk home after meeting up with friends, and my gait thrust me to the right, pressing my face against restaurant windows, startling diners at window seats. I made it to the hospital just in time. For the next year, my brain worked at resetting itself. I never missed a day of work. Nor did my lovely employer care one iota about my health.

As the year progressed, three close friends died, + I was told I had a narrow opening feeding my brain with life needing nutrients, operating to enlarge the opening wasn't an option. The good doctor said to me as he cut me free from his care, "*You should be okay.*"

I want to laugh. I found comedy in suffering.

## 2019

I received another call from my family. An uncle, who used to be a brother-in-law, unless he really is an uncle, had died.

After receiving this call, the family calls ceased until this week (**November 2021**).

I used to be the youngest of seven.

### **Now. I. Have. No. Fucking. Idea. What's true?**

The wonderful *krow* people | perhaps sarcasm | started to press me into transferring to another office. I informed them; the transfer might kill me. They moved me anyway.

In July, I was diagnosed with an Alpha 1 Deficiency. Research showed the life expectancy of those inflicted: was my current age.

*I was going to die.*

Not. It turned out to be a misdiagnosis. My *krow* people –

## 2020

COVID hit. My career came to a grinding halt. I said something to the effect COVID was worrisome, and BAM, livelihood, gone – at 59, turning 60, soon.

No discussion. Nothing. A decade and a half of service, meaningless. I'm not allowed to

talk about this.

*Why?*

Because the people, who could arguably be called ~~slave drivers~~, would more than likely like me to die. *Overdramatic?* No.

And of course, they're predators; even the one who I thought of as a friend cares about only one thing –

**STOP**

In September, I had emergency life-saving surgery.

In October, one of my best friends (52), Scotty, died.

Pain x Pain x Pain = I need to laugh.

*Are you okay?*

*A lot of people come from screwed-up families. You're not the only one going through stuff. Blah. Blah. Blah.*

Please be kind and just say, "shut up."

**2021**

What's a now 61-year-old-man to do?

Write. Write. Write. Write. Tell stories. Be kind. Find compassion and empathy. Believe in yourself. Find the rose-coloured glasses. Move on.

*But the past is trying to obliterate me?*

*Don't let it. Move. Go. Create.*

*What happens when the money runs dry, drier, to dust?*

*Death. Being homeless at 62 is a death sentence.*

*Write. Write. Pay attention. You are talented. You are kind. Life has gifted you with morals + empathy + compassion + humour.*

*But I'm a bastard.*

*It was the times.*

*That didn't help.*

I met my landlords for the first time. They, he + she, dropped by to have me sign documents. I greeted them wearing boxer shorts and a sweatshirt. They seemed like wonderful people. As the conversation flowed, it turns out (he) used to be the Chief Supreme Court Justice of Zimbabwe (Anthony Gubbay) under Robert Mugabe. During his tenure, he passed gender equality and same-sex marriage into law. I was sporting boxer shorts.

The narrative quickly blasted back to my dying sister.

I stopped by a local watering hole for a pop with a friend. Wrestling was on the tube. During a commercial break a warning decorated the screen. Something along these lines:



I laughed. Seriously. *Hasn't wrestling seen The Squid Game?*

I think it might be prudent for every business to put this sign on the inside of their exit doors:



The next time my phone rings, I'm going to be told my sister (?) died. Afterward, I won't receive a call from my family until the next death.

That's what being a bastard is like.

If I'm ever ill, nobody in my family will be called.

In the meantime: I write. I write. I write.

The people I used to |blank| for would like to destroy me.

*Why?*

Because they didn't get every ounce of my blood.

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Fire me a message on the TALK PAGE of my website: [www.lindsaywincherauk.com](http://www.lindsaywincherauk.com) if you have more suggestions on making our world a better place!

