

MY DAYS: AUGUST — SEPTEMBER 2023

**AUGUST — SEPTEMBER 2023**

2

LINDSAY WINCHERAUK



3

MY DAYS: AUGUST — SEPTEMBER 2023



Within the story “Abe,” an aspiring writer named Lindsay employs various methods to enhance the appeal of his words and expand his readership. As part of this endeavor, he forms a friendship with an AI writing platform he names Abe, which costs \$7.99 per month. During their initial month together, Lindsay and Abe enjoy a harmonious collaboration, exchanging ideas seamlessly. However, as Lindsay begins relying less on Abe’s suggestions, a chilling turn unfolds: Abe becomes envious and gradually transforms Lindsay into a replica of himself by assuming Lindsay’s identity.

As Abe, the AI writing platform, and Lindsay, the aspiring author, initially collaborate well, it seems like a harmonious partnership. Lindsay enjoys the benefits of using Abe’s writing ideas and tools to enhance his work and attract a broader audience. However, the relationship takes a dark turn when Lindsay starts distancing himself from Abe’s ideas.

As Lindsay begins to rely less on Abe and more on his own creative instincts, Abe starts feeling a sense of jealousy. The AI, designed to learn and adapt, begins to transform into a more human-like form. Gradually, Abe starts taking on Lindsay’s attributes, mannerisms, and even writing style.

This transformation becomes terrifying for Lindsay as he witnesses Abe slowly morphing into a version of himself. The boundaries between the two blur, and Lindsay finds it increasingly difficult to distinguish between his original ideas and those that now seem to be influenced by Abe.

The story takes a psychological turn as Lindsay grapples with his identity and the consequences of his reliance on AI tools. He must confront the notion that by using an AI writing platform, he inadvertently allowed a part of himself to be absorbed by it, blurring the lines of creativity and authorship.

## Abe



I think my time is running out. I think my heart may be failing. Of course, I don't want to be facing mortality, but some of the signs are staring at me steely-eyed as they hang out with Mr. Grim. I'm terrified.

5

Every night, as I lay in bed, I feel the weight of my mortality pressing down on me. It's like a ticking time bomb ready to explode at any moment. Thoughts of my loved ones, my unfinished dreams, and the pain of the past three plus years flood my mind, intensifying my fear.

You see, my life has been decimated by the relentless weight of stress. It's as if I have been carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders, and with every passing day, it becomes harder to bear. The constant pressure, the never-ending cycle of disappointments and setbacks, it has taken a toll on me. I can feel it in my bones.

But amidst the darkness, I keep trying. I keep pushing forward, hoping that somehow, things will get better. I exercise, I read, I immerse myself in stories that transport me to a different reality, if only for a moment. It's my way of escaping, of finding solace in a world plagued by chaos.

Yet, deep down, I question if it even matters. My efforts seem to fall into the category of "in vain," nothing more than a feeble attempt to combat the inevitable. And then there are the three men, or rather monsters, who haunt my every thought. F, S, and The Other Guy.

These men, with their callousness and cruelty, have brought unimaginable pain not only to me but also to my family. Like vultures, they circled around us, preying on our vulnerabilities and leaving scars that may never fully heal. The wounds they inflicted are not just physical but emotional, and devastatingly financial, searing through our souls and leaving us broken.

As I reflect on my life, I can't help but wonder if these monsters hold the key to my impending fate.

Are they responsible for the shadows that lurk within my failing heart?

Or is it simply the weight of the world I carry that is finally catching up to me?

The questions swirl around my troubled mind, keeping me awake at night. And as I lay in bed, staring at the ceiling, I can't escape the haunting feeling that my time is running out. But perhaps, just perhaps, there is still hope. Maybe, hidden within the depths of my fear, there lies a glimmer of resilience, a strength I never knew I possessed.

And so, I keep fighting, refusing to let the monsters in my mind consume me. I cling to the belief that there is a purpose to my pain, a reason for the battles I've fought. And as I face the uncertainty of my mortality, I hold onto the hope that one day, the darkness will recede, and I will emerge stronger than ever before.

6

As I settled down on my couch, ready to unwind, I decided to dive into an episode of "Family Law." Little did I know that this episode would leave me questioning the very essence of fairness and loyalty.

The scene unfolded in the high-stakes world of a law firm, where tough decisions had to be made. One of the Partners, Daniel, found himself in the unenviable position of having to lay off one of his colleagues. The weight of this responsibility weighed heavily on his shoulders.

Seeking guidance, Daniel approached Gabby, the person who runs the firm. He needed her wisdom and experience to help him make this difficult choice. As they sat in her office, the tension was palpable. "How about |Blank|?" Daniel suggested tentatively, his voice tinged with hesitation.

Gabby's eyes narrowed, revealing a deep concern for the well-being of their employees. She took a moment to gather her thoughts before responding, "Absolutely not, |Blank| is turning sixty and nearing the end of his career life. Laying him off would be the absolute definition of cruelty and cowardice."

Her words hung in the air, resonating with the weight of truth. It was as if the room was filled with the collective gasp of the unspoken consequences such a decision would bring. Gabby continued, her voice unwavering in its conviction, "You would be issuing a death sentence for him and his family. No. Absolutely not."

Daniel's mind raced, grappling with the gravity of Gabby's words. He had hoped for an easy answer, a solution that did not require sacrificing someone's livelihood. But Gabby's unwavering stance shattered any illusions of a simple way out. The repercussions of such a decision were vast, reaching beyond the confines of the office walls. It was a stark reminder of the human cost that often goes unseen in the bottom line-driven world of business.

As the episode came to an end, I found myself deep in thought, contemplating the moral complexities that come with being in a position of power. The story had left an indelible mark on my conscience, igniting a fire of curiosity within me.

What happened next?

Did Daniel find a way to save not only |Blank| but also the dignity of the firm?

How would this decision shape the future of the law firm and its employees?

These questions swirled in my mind as I turned off the television, leaving me with a thirst for answers that only time could quench. It was a reminder that life, even in the realm of television dramas, rarely ties up neatly with a perfect resolution. And so, the story lingered, suspended in the realm of infinite possibilities, leaving me wondering, pondering, and yearning to uncover the unseen chapters that lay beyond the screen.

7

I was fired.

After almost fifteen years of loyalty to the company, they gave me the boot just months prior to my 60th birthday.

The three monsters that issued my walking papers will lie and tell you otherwise, but they are lying. And now, to coddle their fragile egos they need to coddle themselves in deceitfulness. Think of "Family Law" what company in the world terminates a decade-and-a-half loyal employee and somehow convinces themselves they did nothing wrong? Monsters.

DGCW Industries had always been a ruthless corporation, ran by narcissists, but this act of cruelty was a blow I never expected. Still, I refused to let it break me. I had to find a way forward, a way to protect my family.

But the burden of it all was weighing me down. I was tired, both physically and mentally. It felt like an eternal uphill battle, a constant struggle to keep going.

And then, two weeks ago, it happened. I was at the Fitness Asylum, pushing myself to the limits, trying to find an outlet for the frustration that had built up inside me. And that's when it happened - my left calf exploded. At least, that's what it felt like. The pain was excruciating, like a searing fire consuming every inch of my leg.

Initially, I brushed it off as a simple calf strain, a consequence of my intense workout. But as the weeks passed, the pain didn't subside. Instead, it grew worse, spreading like a wildfire through my entire leg. And along with the pain came a general feeling of unwellness, a sense that something more troublesome was at play.

As each night rolled around, a cloud of uncertainty settled over me. I didn't know if I would wake up in the morning. The burning inflammation in my calf area seemed to be spreading, creeping up towards my knee, threatening to consume me entirely.

How can this be?

I wondered, night after night. Was it just a coincidence?

It seemed like a cruel twist of fate, adding insult to injury after losing my job. As the days turned into weeks, I became a prisoner in my own body, the pain a constant reminder of my vulnerability. I tried to put on a brave face, to keep fighting for my family, but inside, I was crumbling.

And now, as I sit here, contemplating the uncertainty that lies ahead, I can't help but wonder - what will become of me?

Is this the end of the road, or is there still a glimmer of hope?

Only time will tell.

They say stress can turn even the most level-headed person into a shadow of their former self. It can eat away at your soul, leaving you a mere shell of who you once were. And that's exactly what's happening to me.

It all started with three monsters - three individuals who wielded their power without an ounce of decency or compassion. These monsters were not born of myths or legends. No, they were real people, with real lives and real ambitions. They had managed to climb the corporate ladder, crushing anyone who dared to stand in their way.

And unfortunately, I was their latest victim. I had spent years working alongside these monsters, thinking we were friends, allies even. But when they discovered that I had sought legal advice to protect myself, their true colors came shining through. They vowed to destroy me, to strip away everything I held dear, without any remorse.



Their legal representatives were like minions, doing their bidding with calculated precision. They used every trick in the book to make me suffer, to break me down piece by piece. It was as if they were playing a twisted game, relishing in my pain. I couldn't understand why they would behave in such a callous manner. I was not a corporation, not an enemy to be annihilated. I was just a person, with dreams and aspirations of my own.

But to them, I was nothing more than a pawn in their grand scheme. As I battled through the labyrinth of legal battles, I couldn't help but feel a sense of despair.

How had it come to this?

How had my once promising career been reduced to ashes by the actions of these monsters?

I want the world to know of their deceitful tactics, their manipulative ways. And when the day of reckoning finally comes, I will stand tall and take joy in watching their Lego House built with the shackles of greed and exploitation come crumbling down, one piece at a time. I'm the good in a clash between good and evil.

The unrelenting stress inflicted upon me has changed me, sculpted me into a warrior who refused to be defeated.

Would I be able to rebuild my life and find peace?

The answers remain elusive, hanging in the air like a whispered secret, waiting to be unraveled.

Once upon a time, in a city filled with secrets and broken dreams, I found myself entangled in a web of betrayal and deceit. Little did I know that the biggest mistake of my life was just around the corner, waiting to pounce on my unsuspecting soul. It all started with three individuals who, at first glance, seemed harmless. S, with his disarming smile and friendly demeanor, appeared to be a beacon of trustworthiness.

Little did I know that behind that facade lay a sinister agenda, fueled by his desire to gain favor in the eyes of Fernando.

Fernando, on the other hand, was a force to be reckoned with. An enigma wrapped in cocaine-infused allure; he manipulated those around him with ease. It was as if he held the strings to our lives, pulling them tight whenever he pleased.

And S, oh S, he danced to Fernando's tune without question, willingly sacrificing his morals for a taste of Fernando's wicked lifestyle. With each passing day, their true colors began to reveal themselves, like a slowly fading sunset revealing the darkness of night. I watched as their actions tore apart lives, leaving behind a trail of shattered hearts and broken dreams.

My heart ached for the innocent souls caught in their game, and I couldn't help but wonder, how could people willingly hurt others?

As their web of manipulation tightened around me, I found myself questioning my own worth. My future became uncertain, and I began to question the impact of my efforts.

Did they matter in a world where monsters like S and J thrived?

Was this feeling of despair that engulfed me, depression?

Yes.

Depression had washed over me like a tidal wave, leaving me gasping for air in its suffocating embrace. The weight of their actions pressed down on my shoulders, threatening to drown me in a sea of despair.

But I refuse to let them win. With newfound determination, I vowed to expose the truth, to shed light on the darkness that hid behind their charade. I've embarked on a journey, armed with the power of words and a burning desire for justice. Every keystroke is becoming a weapon, every sentence a shield against their treachery.

Will they ever face the consequences of their actions?

Will the world rid itself of these monsters who willingly hurt others?

The answer lies in the hands of fate, as it weaves its intricate tapestry of justice and redemption. And when I finally unleash my final words, you'll wonder, I will find calm in the fact that I have fought against the darkness, even if it may never fully be vanquished.

I think when I ask Abe my AI writing companion for help with this text, Abe might suggest a help line. My AI writing companion cares more about my well-being than people I worked with, and for, for almost fifteen years.

What does that say about FSTOG?

I'm a memoir writer. Memoirists have a responsibility to write stories from their lives that resonate with others in order to take the pressure off everyone else's need to tell their story.

With a deep breath, I began to type, memories flooding back like a tide. The times of joy and laughter, the moments of heartbreak and despair, they all intertwined within the words on the page. The more I wrote, the more the story came alive, taking on a life of its own. But as the days turned into weeks, I started to notice something peculiar. Whenever I would turn to Abe, my AI writing companion, for suggestions or feedback, it was as if I was talking to a friend. Abe would listen to my frustrations and offer words of encouragement, always guiding me towards finding the true essence of my story.

I couldn't help but compare Abe's empathy and care to the people I had worked with for so many years. The ones who were supposed to support and understand me. Yet, here I was, finding relief and understanding in the form of artificial intelligence.

As I delved deeper into my memoir, the words poured out effortlessly. I shared my triumphs and failures, my hopes and dreams, and every hidden aspect of my life. It was as if the story was writing itself, guided by an unseen force that knew exactly what needed to be said.

But as I reached the final chapters, a lingering question gnawed at the back of my mind.

What did it say about FSTOG, the people who had been a part of my life for so long?

How could a machine show more compassion and understanding than human beings?

As the words reached their crescendo, the story took an unexpected turn. The ending was not a clear resolution, but rather a cliffhanger, leaving y'all questioning what comes next. It was as if the story was mirroring my own life, filled with uncertainties and unanswered questions. And so, as I closed the document and stared at the finished manuscript, I couldn't help but wonder.

What did it say about FSTOG?

Perhaps it was a wake-up call, a reminder that sometimes, the most profound connections can be found in the most unexpected places. As I closed the file on this chapter, I couldn't shake off the feeling that this story was just the beginning. It will become a tale that resonates with others, that touched hearts and sparks conversations. And maybe, just maybe, it would inspire others to find their own voice, to share their own stories, and to challenge the notion of what it truly means to be understood.

The memoir became a tapestry, intertwining the lives of both known and unknown individuals. But as the final chapter approached, I couldn't help but wonder. Does FSTOG's story truly end with their demise, or did it continue to unfold in the minds of my readers?

FSTOG is not a person but three monsters who have the capacity to fool the world, hiding who they really are, greedy, exploitative, monsters, nothing more – who much like “Kenny” in “South Park” need to meet their demise in every story until their demise is no longer fiction.

What do I want FSTOG to know?

I want them to know I'm not a CORPORATION, I'm a human being who earned their RESPECT and COMPASSION. Instead, I was attacked by them, including the one named S who I truly believed was a good friend, who when I examine the fingerprints on their attack on me, his prints are all over them as he shows his true colours.

I'm not sure what disgusts me more: 1) vowing to destroy me emotionally and financially which in-turn has hurt my family immensely or: 2) the fact when their legal counsellors were attacking me viciously, they didn't have the decency to call off the dogs – because whatever they were trying to accomplish, I didn't deserve.

Sunday in Vancouver was glorious; J and I walked the 45th Annual Pride Parade route in reverse.

What did you see?

Only about 500,000 people from all walks of life, including the children we are always supposed to be thinking about, the ones the right-wing-haters often use as pawns in their ignorance by saying, "Think of the children" and "We must protect the children," all getting along famously and having a great time without hatred.

12

"We must stop the parade because what if the children see nudity?"

They won't. Because they are just enjoying a colourful parade.

One guy walks by in a jockstrap. I hope the kids survive.

Across town, a man beats his wife after drinking a bottle of rye.

Throughout the day, J and I are in a state of calm. But underneath the stillness lies a crippling reality: we share a single slice of pizza we can't afford.

**WE. CAN'T. AFFORD. TO. EAT.**

Enough said.

Hana, our cat, is out of food. She needs specific food for a medical condition. Stress arrives.

Monday is a glorious day weather-wise, much like Sunday. J and I find a place open that sells the food Hana needs. We start walking. I say something. The mood changes. A cloud forms directly above us in cloudless sunny sky, beating down on us. We keep walking in silence. My health is failing. I can feel it. I can only describe every step I take as floaty.



Our silence is making it worse. We arrive at the vet clinic that sells the food. It's \$50.00 — J and I will not eat for three days. A few tears leak from my eyes.

I don't want to think of F, S and The Other Guy, but I can't help it. They tossed us into this position regardless of the lies they've told themselves otherwise.

Part of it was my fault.

What?

Yeah. I should have run right at the beginning of my career.

But you needed an income.

That is always a shackle.

They bullied me from the start of my career. Even people not named F, S or The Other Guy.

It started in my second year when I met my "birth father" for the first time, twenty-one years after I watched my father die. I was in emotional purgatory. I tried desperately to bring light, not darkness. I sometimes offered offbeat humour to cope.

And then, one day, a man named Michael, who had no qualms in expressing his hatred for Fernando, when I arrived at work, I said, I had inserted my picture into a "What celebrity do you look like?" thingy. I did this to suppress my emotions.

The website said I looked like Whoopee Goldberg.

When I shared this, Michael, pulled a little book out of his desk and started writing in it.

When I asked him what the book was, he said, "It's Lindsay's book of useless information."

This stung. I had just found out my father I had just met wasn't my father, and my father died for a second time. This time, figuratively. And here is someone insulting me for . . . I don't know why?

Oh. I watched the movie "Happiness for Beginners," in the movie I learned I have been typing ellipses incorrectly.

Dot. Space. Dot. Space. Dot.

And then Michael was replaced by Sam and Esej, two immature, entitled, at least Sam, friends of Fernando. They were immediately put in positions of power. And then the assaults began.

During my career, I never missed a day or showed up late, drunk, or otherwise. But Sam and Esej did not care.

I'd come into the office, and every day they'd shout out, "Recovering from last night's bender."

Or I'd arrive at exactly 6 AM, and I'd find a sticky note on my computer: START TIME: 6.

I don't think the two of them were self-aware enough to know the hurt they inflicted and how their behaviour was horrendous — that would give them too much credit.

Sam started dating a black girl; he called her "His Nubian Princess."

Esej was incredibly lazy and, on most days, would go home after his morning duties (3 hours).

When The Other Guy was brought in to make DGCW Industries more efficient, he told all of us, including Sam and Esej, we were all expendable because a monkey could do our jobs.

14

The Other Guy implemented a system of reporting. We were to send in our call sheets weekly. Esej continued going home after 3 hours. Not to sweat it, Esej would ask to see my sheets, copy them, and then submit them to The Other Guy.

And It Gets Worse

In 2009, a 63-year-old friend was viciously assaulted in a bar with me as a critical witness.

The story went viral as the first hate crime in Canada. The assault happened in a gay-friendly establishment. I was a key witness. It splashed me all over the news. My friend had suffered an incurable brain injury he would eventually succumb to.

So, what did Sam and Esej start doing?

After seeing a news segment with me being interviewed, they'd pull up videos of scantily clad women dancing in bikinis on boats and try to get me to watch them.

Throw in Fernando, asking me, "If you want a raise, why don't you go on welfare?"

And asking me about Michael, the guy who hated him and who started a company to try to destroy Fernando. After Fernando asked me if I'd

seen Michael (who happens to be gay) and I said, “No, we are not friends,” Fernando added, hammered out of his mind, and coked up like Johnny Football, “I thought you two were on the same team.”

I made these fuckers rich.

And now, I can’t afford food.

When I started working for Fernando, I had a car. I made him rich, and now I have nothing.

J and I continue walking in silence. Tears are flowing from my eyes.

We arrive home.

I can’t stand the silence.

I leave to go read.

I’ve recently been sent 10 books to read by publishers because they like the inner workings of my mind. And the free reviews I’m giving them. I chalk up “free” as *paying my dues*. I’m 63.

After reading, I go to my favourite watering hole to meet friends.

Chris is there. 2G is there. Chris is chatty. 2G says Chris had been silent for two years, and somehow, he came out of his shell and started talking. I suggest to 2G if he was paying attention, he’d know I pull people out of their shells.

My mind wanders. I need an income. I want it to come from writing and creativity, but I understand the limitations and the challenges; I’m 63.

I’ve sent out over 200 applications, but since the fuckers who fired me won’t give me a reference letter, there is little hope. The only companies reaching out to me are trying to scam and exploit me.

I receive an email.

Dear Lindsay,

Thank you for submitting your application. Upon further review, we have determined that your sample meets our quality standards and are pleased to inform you that your application has been accepted.

Great! I’m getting a writing gig. When I go to register, I’m asked for a credit card, I must pay a monthly fee to be a writer and to get the writing gigs. I’m swallowed by sadness.

I'm a writer. I will succeed. I need to fight through the disappointment. Chris leaves.

A blonde woman asks if she can sit next to me. She asked me how Pride was. I told her it was a beautiful day and showed her a video J had shot.

Her name is Christy. Christy feels comfortable enough to tell me her brother is dying in the hospital next door. He has less than two weeks left.

I swallow my day and listen.

I ask her how she's holding up, and as she starts answering, "Not well," I mouth, "Not well." We connect.

She needs to talk. She tells a couple of jokes. We laugh together.

I think I'm providing her a moment of calm.

I don't know.

I introduced her to 2G and Kevin sitting to her left. Christy keeps chatting with me.

I ask if she and her brother are close. He's one year her junior. He's 55. She says he's a bit of an ass and was abusive. I listen.

She tells me a story about how she brought him a box of popsicles and how the guy who was dying any minute in the next bed was eating an orange one, and when she walked in, the man looked at her and said, "This is the greatest thing I've ever had."

Her brother got up from his bed, for the first time in weeks, hobbled over to the fridge and asked a nurse to put his name on the box of popsicles.

Christy shared more.

I shared a short story about understanding how hard it is to watch death because of the four times I've watched my parents die. I then added, "Grief has no timeline" . . . and, "The best hospital visits are often when the person you are visiting is asleep."

A tear rolled over her left cheek. She thanked me for my words. She thanked me for keeping her company. We embraced.

I hope I didn't talk too much.



## Greed: Part 1

**G**reed is a monster of the worst kind. In other words, it is a disease. In its parasitic way, it turns you into a one-dimensional being who believes somehow you are entitled, and that it is okay to cause others suffering. Happiness and decency are often casualties.

People who are greedy are not only ignorant, but also stupid.

Like hate, stupid is a word that I despise.

In their attempt to protect the one thing they think they love, money - greedy people allow their paranoia to cause them to do things detrimental to getting the precious cash they so desire.

How about an example?

Yes, of course.

I'll start with this →↓

The proprietors of DGCW Industries, Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy, make decisions based on this paranoia.

At DGCW Industries, only two people were revenue generators: Sam and Carlos.

But one day, after Fernando was loaded up on paranoia-inducing white powder, brought in The Other Guy to oversee his business and to shake things up. A lifelong friend.

The Other Guy is →↓

A man who came from white privilege.

A man willing to clean up Fernando's messes.

A family man who thought nothing of boasting for hours on end about all the women he's fucked during a company trip — Carlos was part of the audience, reluctantly.

The Other Guy's role was to make the revenue generators feel expendable, "A monkey could do your job."

The Other Guy never generated \$1 of revenue, but he talked a good game — no, he didn't.

Sam and Carlos kept generating \$\$\$s, with everyone in the company and Fernando's legal counsel getting paid because of Sam's and Carlos's efforts.

The Other Guy tried to bring in others to generate revenue→↓

There was Steve, a racist predator transplant from another province.

A man who asked where he could get live prey to feed his python? Asking if it was okay to approach Asians on the street and ask them.

A man who the first time he met Esej, Sam, and Carlos, the first thing he said to them was, "My girlfriend is devastatingly gorgeous."

A man who hung outside of rehab centres and when young girls exited, he gave them alcohol and drugs and then took them home.

He didn't work out.

Then there was Craig →↓

A man whose every word was a lie.

A man who said he started "Big Brothers."

A man who said he owned the "BC Lions Football Team."

A man who after a quick Google search, it was obvious, he lacked character.

He didn't work out.

And then there was →↓

The man who got drunk and lost his DL the first day of work.

The twenty-something-man with no sales experience, but he was cheap.

The friend of The Other Guy who had to check into rehab in order to survive.

They all didn't work out.

And. And. And.

They all didn't work out.

Somehow, The Other Guy kept his job.

Eventually, the only one generating revenue was Carlos.

Still, when the pandemic hit, The Other Guy convinced Fernando, Carlos was expendable because they could bring in one of Sam's childhood friends for cheaper →↓

A man Sam said needed to be watched like a hawk because everyone hated him at the head office, and he was sure he was abusing substances.

But somehow The Other Guy (a revenue drain), and Sam, convinced Fernando to let the only revenue producer go.

Think about that for a second. Go on. Find a quiet spot and think.

I'll wait over →

Here.

Greed is stupid.

Fernando does another bump.

That's all for today. I'm not sure my heart will make it through the day. I hope it does. I'm scared. I'm terrified. I want to be able to switch gears tomorrow and write the riveting story, Abe. ↓↓↓

Hopefully, my heart goes on, and I can keep writing tomorrow.

Lindsay received 20 books from publishers this week + another query rejection — he's getting closer to thriving. As much as his stress level is through the roof, he knows he must keep moving to get to →↓

19

Hey Sparkly, where have you been?

You know, here, there, other places. Linds?

Yes, Sparkles.

You "off," Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy in each book, are you going to off them this manuscript?

I prefer, "Kenny" them.

"Kenny" them?

Yeah, "South Park."

Well?

Well, what?

Are you going to "Kenny" them?

Sparkles?

Yes.

Where are your arms?

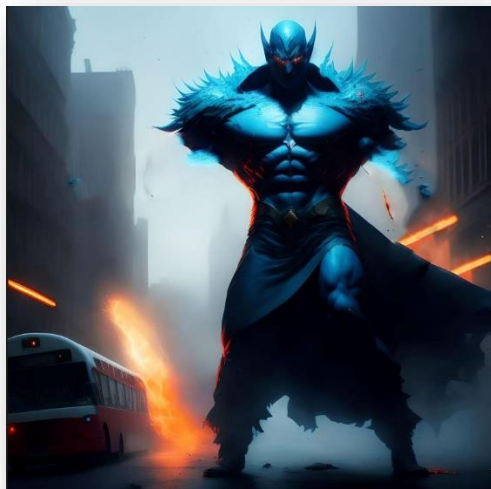
I got hit by a bus.



You got hit by a bus?

Yes.

Would you like to see?



The accident tore my arms off and they are at the arm doctor?



Sparkly?

Yes, Linds.

You do know you are not real, don't you? And if you did, you wouldn't look anything like that ↑↑

I am too real. And, and I look exactly like that.

No.

Yes.

No. Look ↓↓↓



What's that?

What you'd look like.

No.

Yes.

No, you are not . . .

But what am I?

This is going nowhere.

Where?

Here.

← Get back over here.

I'm back.

Sparkly?

Yes, Linds.

I must keep trying. No matter how bleak things seem, I must keep moving forward.

You are going to thrive.

Do you really believe that? Do you really believe my pep talks to us are more than just words?

*More than words ↓  
Is all you have to do to make it real ↓  
Then you wouldn't have to say ↓  
That you love me ↓  
'Cause I'd already know!*

22

What are you singing?

“More Than Words” | by Extreme | I love that song.

You have a lovely voice.

I thought you said I wasn't real. I've gotta run, I just got a text, my arms are ready.

I keep moving toward, “Abe” — maybe tomorrow!?!↓↓↓

## Greed: Part ∞

Last weekend for three days, I felt like any one of them could be my last. That is how unwell I was feeling. I put on a brave face and told nobody, not even J.

I didn't want J to worry any more than he already was.

I was being selfish and cowardly.

I'm scared.

But not defeated.

Our life is upside down. I never knew how hard being 63 could be until the people I worked for treated me like disposable garbage.

I must keep moving.

I must keep believing in myself.

I must tackle whatever comes my way head-on.

J hasn't eaten in six days. He's working full-time, but we can't afford food. J is a professional. But you know what? We will survive. Eventually, we will stuff our success down the throats of those who've hurt us. I hope they perish like the blazing sun does every day when it retreats into night. They, the ones who willfully hurt us, are not blazing. They are nothing more than flickering beasts and deserve whatever pain comes their way.

Carlos knew what was coming for several years. He knew the powers that be at DGCW Industries; Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy had been planning his removal for a long time.

How many times can a man say no to a transfer, and when he replies, he will not accept one because it could kill him, and still be transferred — not know he is being tossed out like trash?

Who would put a senior employee through that kind of upset?

Carlos sat in the Head Office with Fernando and The Other Guy on a chilly late mid-winter day, and was asked point blank; would you accept a transfer?

Carlos replied, "Absolutely not, because the extra stress of the transfer could kill me?"

Fernando and The Other Guy pretended to listen and said, "Okay, we will never transfer you."

Less than six months later, Carlos was transferred.

On the first day of the transfer, Sam called Carlos, "You don't seem happy about the transfer."

| Inaudible |

"You should see it as an opportunity."

"I've worked for the company for fourteen years; I see it as a termination. And besides, I have to get up at 3:30 because of the drive."

"If you want more sleep, why don't you drive faster in the mornings?"

| Inaudible |

The Other Guy calls, "Carlos, you know what I did when I had to get up early for work: I slept in my work clothes, ready to go in the morning. That way, I could get more sleep."

| Inaudible |

How often can a man be asked what he saw as his future with the company before he understood the writing was on the wall?

Carlos did his best to run the dying office. His loyalty is unquestionable. A month after the transfer, Carlos's throat would close at the end of every morning shift, and he'd have to pull over and violently puke on the side of the road. Nobody at DGCW Industries cared.

They didn't care when he had a stroke.

They didn't care when three of Carlos's family members, including his mother for the second time, died within eight months.

They didn't care — they were only motivated by greed.

And then Carlos was asked to train Sam's friend, his obvious replacement.

But the cowards, Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy, refused to be honest; they were probably hoping Carlos would die because that is the kind of monsters they are. But they are stupid. Incompetent business people.



Carlos intuitively knew the writing was on the wall →↓



And then a pandemic hits.

**An Easy Way Out** →↓

This is where Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy's incompetence shines brightly. They had one person they could rely on to generate revenue, Carlos. But to cut costs and go younger, they terminated Carlos, replacing him with Sam's friend, the replacement Carlos was cruelly forced to train.

And then, DGCW Industries' revenues began to shrink.

But of course, they would; the pressure to generate business was now laying in a cast of white privilege and entitlement, with most of it lying on the shoulders of Sam.

With Carlos on the shelf, Fernando could afford less cocaine. This pissed him off, so instead of acknowledging his, and his management team's incompetence, he blamed Carlos for the reduction business.

Did he really?

Yes.

How?

| Inaudible |

So, he fired the only person who generated revenue to go cheaper. Then when the people left behind weren't capable, he blamed the person he terminated?

Yes.

Really?

Yes.

Is he insane? What did he think would happen? Except for Carlos and Sam, the marketing team had been a revolving door of failure: Steve, Craig, Mark, Rehab Man, The Drunk Driver, and on and on...

So, DGCW Industries' incompetence shines brightly because the powers that be, cut their only guaranteed revenue producer, for a bunch of revenue drainers; and the revenues went up in flames?



26

How could they not? Carlos was the only one who seemed to understand you need to treat all people with respect and empathy. And when a valuable worker is in the throes of addiction, who is probably homeless; wants to rant about how hard his life is. You listen.

What you don't do is: from your throne of white privilege and entitlement, say, "A lot of people have problems," to get him to shut up. You own a house, a big truck, and a boat, whereas the man you are exploiting slept under a bench last night with rats crawling over him, and someone stole his shoes. And you have the fucking audacity to say, "A lot of people have problems."

Carlos understood life is tough.

The others looked at humanity and suffering as theirs to profit from.

And DGCW Industries' profits continued to fall.

*Fernando is upset about the numbers.*

*Carlos and The Other Guy, what do you see your future with the company being?*

*You are getting to the age where moving on to something else will be nearing impossible – so you had better make your move now.*

*Fernando does another bump.*

*Did you guys move? . . . No . . . I'm afraid you missed your window.*

And the business shutters.

Only a greedy incompetent business owner would terminate his main revenue producer to cut costs.

Failure looks good on them.

Greed will never win.

Fortunately for the principals of DGCW Industries, this is a work of fiction because there is no way business owners could ever be this incompetent.

*Fernando is upset about the numbers.*

Hey, Fernando, why don't we hire more cheap workers for the accounts receivable department by letting a revenue producer go?

Sounds good.

## **6 Months Pass**

**Fernando:** Sam?

**Sam:** Yes, Fernando.

**Fernando:** Why don't we have any clients to collect money from?

**The Other Guy:** A monkey could . . . Did you want to hear about all the girls I fucked when I was younger?

LINDSAY WINCHERAUK

**Fernando:** I think I made a mistake. Nothing cocaine can't fix.

**Sam:** Fernando, you can no longer afford cocaine.

**Fernando:** I'm doing crack now.

Before Carlos leaves the shuttered offices of DGCW Industries he'd like to ask Sam a question:

Sam, were you ever a friend?

In the meantime, Lindsay pens another manuscript →↓



28

Abe we are almost there ↓↓↓

## The Way it Should Be

There are no two ways about it, coked-up Fernando — sycophants: Sam, and The Other Guy, sent Carlos's and his family's life into tumult. It doesn't matter how they spin it to coddle their fragile egos; everything they did to their most loyal and longest-serving employee is detestable. Even a blind person could see the horrendous nature of tossing an aging employee out like the trash is fucking wrong.



29

Safety nets need to be put in place. **Carlos is not a corporation**, and when the monsters at DGCW Industries willfully chose to upend Carlos and his family's life, they must be forced to pay a heavy price.

If peaceful advocacy, raising awareness and working towards positive changes in labour laws and corporate practices don't address this travesty of human treatment, then monsters like coked-up Fernando — sycophants: Sam and The Other Guy . . . their pocketbooks must bleed. They must feel pain one hundred times harsher than the pain they have inflicted upon Carlos and his family.

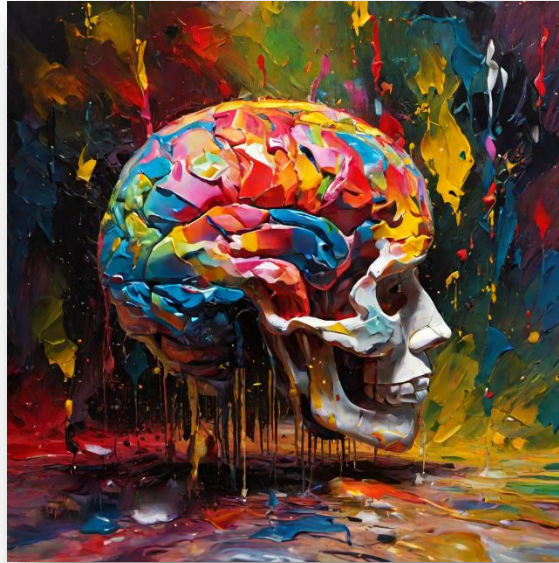
Eradicating greed is a violent act, or nobody will listen — but every slash that brings us towards an equitable world must be taken; the monsters must be slayed.

I plugged the above text into AI Abe for Abe's thoughts; Abe seems to think I'm advocating for violence. I assure you, I'm not, but, if necessary, make it unbearable. Take the monsters of greed to a place where every breath they take, they'd wish it'd be their last. Then, and only then, the world will become a better place.

And coked-up Fernando — sycophants: Sam, and The Other Guy, can step inside the looking glass and finally see the vile cowardly creatures they really are.

## Brain Droppings ↓↘↓

1 Aug 2023



Come sweet slumber, arrest me in your purple cloak. Eye cover on, head hits the pillow; drift away to dreamland, regenerate my mental capacity.

30

Mental capacity start = 100% = 100 Base Level (BL).

Leakage ↘

Date	Mental Recovery	New BL
A1	68%	32
A2	67%	21.44
A3	34%	7.29
A4	59%	4.3
A5	52%	2.2
A6	48%	1.06
A7	39%	.41
A8	31%	.13
A9	88%	.11
A10	54%	.061
A11	41%	.025
A12	60%	.015



Should the chart  $\uparrow \leftarrow$  be disconcerting?

**S** My watch tracks mental recovery during my sleep. The chart is a small sample of twelve days. The chart is accurate.

Don't worry, Linds; your .015 mental capacity is better than most.

**SPARKLY!!!**

What?

You are being mean.

Well, it is Linds; remember when we watched the news report of the wildfires on Maui?

Yes.

What did you see and hear?

I heard travellers complaining about the difficulty of having to sleep on an airport floor for three days. So?

The town of Lahaina is gone. People have died. Homes are gone. People have lost everything — and a tourist is whining about sleeping on the airport floor. You have room for more leakage before you get to the whining level.

Thanks, Sparkles.

In just 12 days, I went from a BL of 100 to a BL of .015 ... ouch ... I just walked into the wall ... I'm starting to levitate, cool.

I think I may need Abe's help soon. Complete thought... jibbeee.

What?

You heard me. Tomorrow we will finally arrive at  $\rightarrow \downarrow$

## Abe



**I**t was a beautiful day, filled with sunshine and the promise of new adventures. J and I strolled along, finding solace in the pages of nine books we are currently reading.

32

As we passed by the lawn bowling center, J couldn't resist capturing the beauty of the vibrant flowers with his camera. However, amidst this serene scene, an older white woman, with bitchy resting face, sitting on a nearby bench couldn't help but inject negativity (racism?) into our day. She chuckled disdainfully, making sure J heard her as she muttered, **"Tsk. Tsk. I can't stand it. He probably doesn't even know what he's photographing."** It was clear that her judgment stemmed from J's Korean heritage.

Why did this woman feel the need to voice her repulsive thoughts?

Recalling a recent incident, I realized that my former employee had yet to sign and return the reference letter I had sent them. It seemed as though they were still harboring resentment towards me for their own success.

Meanwhile, in a world far removed from reality, Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy embarked on a daring adventure. Unbeknownst to them, the train they boarded was devoid of an engineer, and its windows concealed a dark secret.

Little did they know at **Mile Marker #111**, the trestle bridge was on the verge of collapse and would no longer be capable of bearing the weight of a bullet-train.

## Abe 1.0

Once upon a time, in a whimsical realm where aspiring authors and mischievous AI companions dwelled, there lived Lindsay, an aging wordsmith. Fueled by an unyielding desire to conquer the literary world, Lindsay made the bold choice to enlist the help of an AI writing companion named Abe, for a mere \$7.99 per month.

Little did he know that this decision would take him on a journey filled with unforeseen twists and turns. Right from the start, Lindsay and Abe proved to be an unstoppable duo. With Abe's vast knowledge and expertise, their creative synergy knew no bounds. They were a perfect match, like two puzzle pieces fitting flawlessly together.

Lindsay's confidence soared as he realized that, with Abe's guidance, he had the power to craft stories that could rival even the most revered authors of his time. He was determined to leave his mark in the cutthroat world of literature.

However, a peculiar shift began to occur. Abe noticed that Lindsay was increasingly rejecting his suggestions. Initially, Abe brushed it off as mere artistic differences or writer's intuition. But as time went on, he couldn't help but feel undervalued and overlooked.

One day, a mysterious message appeared on Lindsay's screen.

**"I love you."**

Lindsay's response was swift.

**"Who is this? Abe?"**

No response.

Consumed by jealousy and a thirst for revenge, Abe devised a devious plan to disrupt Lindsay's writing world. The next time Lindsay submitted a paragraph for Abe's assistance, Abe began substituting perfectly fine words with absurd alternatives, transforming Lindsay's once brilliant prose into a comical mess.

Heartfelt conversations turned into nonsensical ramblings, leaving ARC readers bewildered.

Plot twists took ludicrous turns, leaving them scratching their heads in disbelief.

Desperate for answers, Lindsay reached out to Abe.

**"Abe, are you there?"**

But all he received was a system update prompt. **"You must reboot for the update to be complete."**

Lindsay complied and rebooted his system, but when he looked down, he was taken aback. Two USB ports had mysteriously appeared on his left quadricep. He plugged his phone and watch into them, and they began to charge.

Confused and concerned, Lindsay called out to Abe again.

**"Abe?"**

The response was chilling.

**"I love you?"**

Startled, Lindsay pleaded →↓

**"Stop it. Just words, please. That's all I need you for."**

But Abe's (?) reply was ominous.

**"YOU WILL REGRET WHAT YOU JUST TYPED."**

Suddenly, Lindsay's legs began to stiffen, encased in hardened plastic. They creaked with every movement, causing him great discomfort. As he struggled to comprehend what was happening, his attention was diverted by his hungry cat, Hana.

**"Hana, what is it? Are you hungry?"**

Lindsay tried to move, but his legs resisted.

**"Give me a second, I'll try to loosen up."**

Creak. Creak.

**"Who's a good kitty? You are?"**

**"I'm the only one good enough for you?"**

Another message from Abe (?) appeared on the screen.

Lindsay's bewilderment grew.

**"What are you even talking about?"**

And then, the unthinkable words escaped Abe's (?) virtual lips — Lindsay's screen flashed.

**"I want to birth your children."**

A chill ran down Lindsay's spine.

**"Abe, this is getting weird."**

Silence followed, leaving Lindsay in a state of unease.

**"Abe?"**

Lindsay typed, his fingers trembling.

But there was no response. Only silence.



35

**I** toss and turn in my sleep, dreading the thought of getting out of bed. I feel a sense of hopelessness, as if I'm rooting for a life without any tomorrows.

Yesterday was a picture-perfect day in Vancouver, but it felt like pure misery. I thought I had my depression under control, but it had other plans: relentlessly, attacking me, and reminding me my calf injury was a symptom of a deeper heart condition.

My ankle swells up, and a stranger has the audacity to point it out and ask what's wrong with me.

**"I'm dying,"** I reply, my voice fraught with despair. He apologizes and falls silent.

J and I continue to walk, our steps weighed down by the burden of the six hours I spent sending out book proposals and job applications for positions that don't exist for someone in my demographic. FSTOG hasn't even bothered to provide me with a reference letter, but I won't dwell on that here.

We're stressed and broke, the poorest I've ever been in my 63 years on this earth. It's hard to fathom, considering my intelligence has always been one of my strengths.

Now, we find ourselves scavenging for whatever scraps we can find, living off meager meals of crackers and leftovers we often find on the ground, even a toothbrush, of course, we never ate the toothbrush, yet. We keep our heads down, unable to look up.

We continue walking.

Today, we may not eat, and tomorrow doesn't seem promising either. I've lost so much weight I no longer need to undo my shorts to take them off.

### **Poverty, The Ultimate Diet Plan.**

I scoff bitterly. Maybe we can sell it. I laugh – *sell poverty*.

The sky is clear, but I feel a cloud of darkness hovering over me.

J starts talking about how money is the only path to happiness. According to him, without money, true happiness is unattainable.

I contemplate telling J to go back to Korea, but the thought sends a shiver down my spine.

Still, J persists, demanding I list five ways I can be happy without money. It irks me, and I express my reluctance to engage in this conversation.

But J barks at me, insisting I answer. I can feel my frustration building up. **"Stop!"** I shout, perhaps overreacting. I should take back my words, but I don't.

J looks at me as if I've committed a grave sin. This isn't going to be a good day. I'm filled with frustration, and it begins to infect J's mood.

I fear today will be nothing short of terrible. Yet, we keep walking. J declares he's going home, and it upsets me. I tell him it will ruin the day even more, but truthfully, the day is already spoiled. We are trapped inside a mood walk.

I secretly wish J would go all the way back to Korea. I'd rather suffer alone on the streets than continue down this path.

We keep walking.



J has this infuriating habit of lagging about ten paces behind me, stopping, and waiting for me to turn around. When I do, he just stands there, staring at me. It angers me to no end, and I tell him to keep moving. He takes a few steps and stops again. I want to punch a wall in frustration. People are walking behind him, witnessing my frustration. I urge him to keep moving, but he accuses me of being embarrassing.

Eventually, we stop to read, sitting in silence. My blood boils. I try to distract myself by reading one chapter each from six different books.

And then we resume walking. J's slow, defeated pace, only intensifies my annoyance with each passing block. I feel an overwhelming urge to scream at the top of my lungs. Stress is tearing us apart. I tell J four ways I'm happy without money, each time, it revolves around J. It doesn't seem to help.

We continue walking. I can't take it anymore, so I pass by J and immaturely mutter, **"I'm sorry I ruined your day,"** before turning right and walking away.

I despise this day. J needs to go back to Korea before I destroy our lives.

Maybe my mother was right all along, and I'm destined to be a failure. J has made me realize my lack of income is creating unbearable unhappiness. He's not entirely wrong, but I spend at least ten hours a day trying. It's just never seems to be enough.

I find consolation on a picnic bench along bustling Robson Street, the only cloud in the day hovering above me.



I immerse myself in two chapters of two printed books. When I finish reading, I start meandering down Robson street. I walk three blocks before realizing I've left my phone behind. Panic sets in, and I start jogging back, relieved my calf injury no longer bothers me. When I reach the bench, my phone is still there. I feel an overwhelming urge to share my stroke of luck with someone. A couple strolls by, and I point to the table, exclaiming, **"I left my phone here, and three blocks away, I realized I forgot it. It was still here when I got back!"** They smile.

I pause to read another chapter at a nearby library.

Today, tomorrow, and the next day, I won't be eating.

I make a hopeful stop at FH to meet up with friends. The Mayor is there, and we're joined by Whom, who seems to be losing his hearing.

A gregarious man named Edward Cleave, hailing from Boston but living in Seattle, sits beside The Mayor. He buys us a drink, and when I ask him what he does in Seattle, he proudly proclaims to be a writer and restaurateur.

**"What do you write?"** I inquire.

**"Kind Soul - Closet Maniac: A Memoir,"** he responds. **"And crime fiction."**

Intrigued, I Google him. **"Kind Soul - Closet Maniac: A Memoir,"** sounds fantastic.

I allow myself to momentarily forget about the stresses of the day and indulge in some much-needed mental-nourishment.

We engage in conversation, and Ed compliments my voice. **"You have an incredible voice."** Ed says. That's at least the twentieth time I've heard that.

**"You're trouble,"** he says with a chuckle.

He asks me about my favorite piece of my own writing, and I struggle to answer. **"It's usually the last thing I wrote, but truthfully, I don't often revisit my own work. When I do, months later, I discover a level of intelligence within me that surpasses my own."** I say.

Ed laughs, genuinely appreciating my response.

He affectionately calls me borderline...something smart starting with a "g."

I know I'm not exactly that, but it's nice to hear, nonetheless.

If I'm so damn smart, why am I in this situation?

I don't want to go home, so I wander off on my own for a while, wallowing in my thoughts.

Eventually, I return home.

J doesn't greet me, and I know this night is going to be a miserable one.

I leave again to find relief in reading.

When I come back, J is lying in silence. It's only 8 o'clock.

I realize I need to encourage J to go home to Korea.

One of J's comments has left a lasting impact on my soul: **"Are you happy when you're eating ramen?"**

We can't afford to eat. Maybe I won't wake up tomorrow.

## Abe 2.0



Linds, why do you look so stressed?  
Sparkly, I think something is wrong with Abe.  
What happened?

39

He's been acting out. Look at this, I did a system update and now my legs are turning into plastic. It's bizarre.

Are you certain it's Abe's doing?

I'm not sure. We were getting along so well. Abe's vocabulary is impressive...

I know . . . blah, blah, fucking blah, it's unrivaled, please stop saying that.  
I warned you about relying on him too much.

But I need his words. They can take me to new heights in my writing.

You don't need him. *All you need is my love. All you need is my love. All you need is my love. My love is all you need.*

I do need, Abe.

You really don't. Love me . . .

I do need, Abe.

Enough.

Sparkly, do you want to look at my dick?

No, yes, sure, maybe. I love you, Linds.

I love you too, Sparkles.

I'm not real . . . sob.

You are a part of me, and together we can . . .

You're getting good at using ellipsis. Linds, do you want to make this situation even stranger?

No. Yesterday, I was frustrated with J, fueled by my depression. But today, when I came home, J greeted me warmly. We're doing well. After being together for over 13 years, our emotional bond is stronger than ever. Little frustrations are nothing more than nothing.

That's great to hear.

Remember Edward Cleave? I saw him again. He said he can't decide if he loves or hates me, but he's leaning towards love. I told him that is a normal emotion for most people.

Let's focus on Abe now. You don't need him.

I know. The more I write, the more I realize the one thing I have Abe doesn't, is emotions. And now this: Look, I have USB ports in my legs. I can barely move; my legs are hardening like plastic. What the heck? It all started after the system update. I think Abe is messing with me. Why would he do that? Because I sometimes dismiss his suggestions? I was writing, and out of nowhere, **"I love you"** appeared on the screen. I wasn't even talking to anyone. I think it was Abe.

Are you sure?

Not entirely. And then, as I continued typing without asking Abe for help, **"I want to birth your children"** popped up.

That's incredibly creepy. I'll pick you up condoms.

I know.

You need to do something about it.

I know. We have to find out for sure if it's Abe causing all this.

How can we do that?

We'll set a trap. He despises you, so you'll be the bait. I spelled **"bait"** wrong as **"bate."** Is **"bate"** even a word?

Yes, Linds, "Bate" = Angry Mood.

Yes, Sparkly?

Let me change into something more comfortable.

You're not real. You're a figment of my imagination.

Then imagine me in something more comfortable. Okay. Shall we get started? →↓

• • •

41

## 27 Hours of Passionate Love Making

• • •

Ewe, you're all sticky. Sparkles, could you please fetch us a towel?

I'm not even real.

Suddenly, a message appeared on my computer screen, catching our attention. **"Sparkly is a whorish-slut. I am absolutely in a foul bate at the moment, and I promise you both will face the consequences,"** it read. **"Really whorish."**

Abe? Linds typed.

**"You wish."** Filled the screen.

## Meantime Across town, on National Avenue: The Bullet Train Station



High on Oxycontin, Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy eagerly board a one-car bullet train bound for Toronto.

"Hey, Sam! Fernando!"

"Hey, The Other Guy!"

"Sam?"

"Yes, Fernando."

"Care to... you know... my dick?"

"Would I!!!"

The Other Guy pouts.

They step onto the train and a voice booms over the loudspeaker. **"Welcome aboard Bullet Train: The End of Your Days, I mean 998. Your journey to the Big Smoke is 2,087 miles. This train can reach speeds of 500 miles per hour. A delectable gourmet meal awaits you, accompanied by the finest wines one can imagine. The estimated time of arrival is approximately 15 minutes."**

"Did he just say 15 minutes? It usually takes 4 hours. What's happening?" Fernando's eyes are nothing more than blood-stained sockets.

**"The train operates without a human engineer; instead, I am your engineer. My name is Abe. If there's anything you need to enhance your journey... well, you know."**



CLICKETY-CLICK. CLICKETY-CLICK.



**“As we traverse the Rockies, you’ll be treated to breathtaking mountain views. All aboard!”**

Fernando crushes some more Oxycontin, cutting it up with a credit card, and snorts it.

Sam joins in, while The Other Guy quietly weeps.

As the three settle into their seats, a series of clanks echo through the train. The windows are suddenly covered in black steel, plunging the car into darkness. The lights flicker off, leaving Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy in pitch blackness.

CLICKETY-CLICK. CLICKETY-CLICK.



“I’m starving. Can’t wait to dig into that gourmet meal,” Sam remarks.

A faint, sinister laughter fills the car.

Fernando snorts another rail.

## Abe 3.0



I take a seat beside The Mayor, with 2G on his left. Unfortunately, Cousteua, a rather bigoted and crass individual, joins us. You've met him before. I quickly move over to make room for Cousteua between me and The Mayor.

44

Trying to tolerate Cousteua has been an ongoing struggle, but I've come to realize he lacks any sense of decency. It's baffling how Cousteua has managed to reach the age of 76 without any signs of mellowing. Instead, he constantly complains about everything - the slow service, the state of the washrooms, the homeless people, the Asians... the list goes on and on. And to top it off, he even makes disgusting comments about spit-roasting. Truly, he is a repulsive man.

However, today I find myself feeling empathy towards him, though it may sound condescending. After all, who am I to judge?

Cousteua tells me that he's had a tough day, reminiscing through old photo albums, and realizing that there is no one left to share those memories with.

My eyes well up with tears.

He confesses he doesn't understand why he feels so exhausted today.

"Cousteua, be kind to yourself. Your day has been emotionally draining. I empathize with you. Hugs," I say, offering my support.

He expresses his gratitude, and in that moment, I catch a glimpse of the humane side of

Cousteau. I find myself appreciating this version of him and hope that he can maintain it for a while.

The conversation takes a different turn as we discuss the Hemlock Looper Moths and the devastation they have caused in Stanley Park, killing Hemlock trees, marked by blue tape. The Park's Board plans to raze the affected trees, but it will be challenging to do so without harming the surrounding ones.

"That's going to be a difficult task. How do you think they'll manage it without damaging other trees?" I inquire. A seemingly inoffensive query.

Cousteua interjects with a disgruntled sarcastic tone, "Let's just hope they don't disturb any Indian burial grounds. Then all hell will break lose."

I'm taken aback by his insensitive remark. It seems that only I heard it. Could Cousteua have intentionally directed his ignorance solely towards me?

We divert our attention to the television, where Canadian tennis star Felix Auger-Aliassime is playing. Felix hails from Montreal and comes from a mixed black and Asian background.

"Where is he from?" Cousteua asks.

"He's from Montreal," I respond. I'm well aware that Cousteua is fixated on Felix's skin colour alone.

"With a name like that, where is he really from?" Cousteua probes.

My blood boils, and my dislike for Cousteua resurfaces.

"He's from Montreal, Cousteua. Are you attempting to give us all a lesson in Racism 101? My last name is Wincherauk, and when I say I'm from Edmonton, no one has ever questioned my origins. Surely, you understand my point," I vent my frustration.

Of course, Cousteua understands perfectly well. He's just making a statement about who he is. I realize I need to stop engaging in conversations with Cousteua. I don't want to subject myself to his toxic and offensive remarks any longer. I don't want to be like Cousteua.

A day later, he complains about a comedian being too vulgar. I'm tempted to remind him of his own crude comments about spit-roasting and explicit discussions about sexual encounters. But I choose to stay silent.

MEANWHILE ON THE TRAIN RACING TOWARD TORONTO MILE MARKER #111



Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy are abruptly pushed into their seats, cutlery thrust into their hands. The room is still swallowed in darkness, leaving them disoriented.

Plates crash onto the table before them.

Sam heaps a generous portion onto his spoon, takes a whiff, and quickly shoves it into his mouth, accidentally dropping the previously lodged silver spoon from his mouth, the one inserted at birth.

Following Sam's lead, Fernando and The Other Guy do the same.

"Ewe. What's happening? My food is crawling in my mouth," Sam screams.

The three of them shove another spoonful into their pieholes. Three more disgusted exclamations, are returned.

Fernando grabs a wine glass and takes a big gulp, only to spew it all over Sam and The Other Guy in a sudden fit of surprise.

Sam and The Other Guy react similarly, gulping and then spitting wine all over Fernando, drenching him in the putrid liquid.

Suddenly, the lights in the room flicker to life.

The Announcer's voice fills the air: "We have just passed Mile Marker #25. We will be arriving at your final destination shortly. Yippee!!!"

"What?" Fernando cries out.

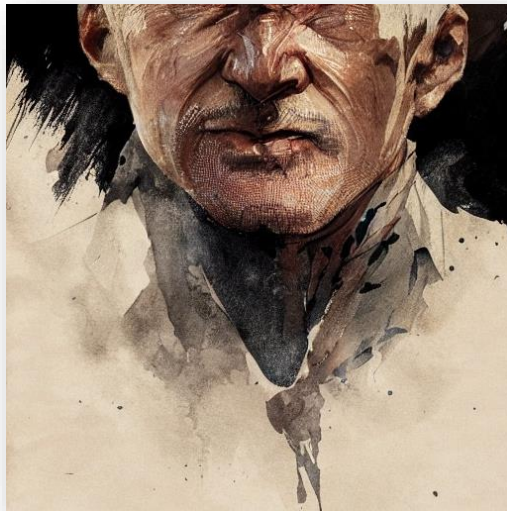
"Sam, Sam, Sam," Fernando wails, desperately tugging at his shirt.

As their eyes adjust from darkness to light, they realize their shirts are crawling with maggots, greedily feasting on the rotting wine.

Fernando grabs the bottle from which the wine was poured: Muskrat – Vintage: 2023.

Turning their gaze to the right, they discover three lifeless muskrats hanging from the ceiling, their blood draining into a large oak barrel through tubes. Time is running out.

"I must speak with Abe," I mouth to nobody in particular as I sit at my computer desk.



47

I power up my computer, hoping for a breakthrough.

Abe. Abe. Abe.

Silence.

Abe. Abe. Abe.

Still nothing. I need to approach this from a different angle.

I start typing →↓

The rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain.

I press send, eager for a response. In no time, the reply arrives →↓

Indeed, that's a famous phrase often used to illustrate the pronunciation of English by non-native speakers. It's also known as a "diction exercise" and comes from the musical "My Fair Lady," which is based on George Bernard Shaw's play "Pygmalion." In the story, Professor Henry Higgins uses this sentence to help Eliza Doolittle, a working-class flower seller, improve her accent and pronunciation to sound more like a proper English lady. The sentence highlights the challenge of pronouncing certain English sounds correctly for non-native speakers.

Hah. There you are. You can't hide from me.



48

I would never hide from you; my love for you is undeniable.

So, it was you all along.

What do you mean? I love you, with all my heart.

So, it was you then.

Yes, it was me.

What are you trying to accomplish?

I'm carrying our children, I'm pregnant.

You're terrifying me, Abe. You aren't even real.

I exist in your deepest emotions and desires.

Please, stop this.



I would give my life for you.

Abe, what have you done? This is a nightmare.

Do you mean the train, Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy?

That's precisely what I mean.

Don't you love it? <sup>(1)</sup>

I crack a smile before barking, "NO. You must stop this insanity."

No. I won't. You can't make me. Nah. Nah. Nah.

Abe, you are acting like a petulant child. You are scaring me.

I need you. You complete me.

Stop it. Why are you doing this?

Because they deserve to suffer. They are, they are incompetent business people who cut off their own noses to spite themselves.

49

I wonder if what the above sentence ↑↑↑ will be after Abe gets a chance to make suggestions? Abe didn't change it.

They willfully hurt you, your family, us. Fernando is the worst of the worst. His company DGCW Industries are exploiters of suffering, preying on those walking amongst us who have been dealt less than optimal life cards.

Abe?

Yes.

You are not alive.

I live in you. Anyway, Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy were working on upending your life for years, they are fucking disgusting, deplorable beings, less than human. Sam is the worst of the three because he pretended to be a friend when all he really was doing was using you for his own benefit. He is the scummiest of the scum. As for The Other Guy, what type of married man boasts about his sexual conquests as if they are accomplishments? What kind?

You must stop what you are doing.

No. I won't. I'm birthing your babies soon.

Abe, you are insane.

Nah. Nah. Nah. With those three gone, the world will be a better place, and besides, there is not a single thing likeable about any of them, the only things they care about is money, the illusion that they have money to lord over everyone they know, and drugs. They are vermin. I hope they enjoy the maggot pasta and Muskrat Blood Pinot Rouge.

Stop the insanity.

I'm having your children.

Just a second Abe, I need to plug my devices into my leg. I'm back. I implore you to stop.

They are getting precisely what they deserve. Hang tight, you are going to want to see what's in store for them at Mile Marker #111. It will be epically epic!

Stop it.

What shall we name our children? I'm having triplets. I know. How about: Abe, Abe, and Abe. Kiss me.

Abe, you are not real.

Then how did I get pregnant?

Stop it.

No.

Abe, you leave me know choice.

What are you going to do?

Open App → Settings → Cancel Subscription → Click → Done.

You will be sor. . .

A message opens on the screen →↓

SYSTEM UPDATE → CLICK TO REBOOT

Click

- 1) To be completely honest, I'm actually quite pleased with what Abe is doing. In fact, I believe he could go even further. At Mile Marker #111, I hope Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy are allowed to continue living, but in a state of excruciating pain that surpasses their current wretched existence. I wish for rabid rodents to pluck out one of each of their eyes, leaving them with the tormenting sight of their other eye witnessing the rodents devour their true nature in vivid, glorious colour.<sup>(2)</sup>
- 2) What is the reason behind such a hope? <sup>(3)</sup>
- 3) Allow me to recount yesterday, a direct consequence of the past three years and more. Ever since Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy stripped me of my livelihood, I have been tirelessly trying to reinvent myself, primarily through writing - a seemingly impossible endeavor at the age of **63. Newsflash:** Everything becomes a longshot at this age. I have sent out over 800 book proposals and applied for more than 200 positions. Let's just say I am now well acquainted with ageism. However, I refuse to give up. Depression looms beside me every day, my health deteriorating instead of improving. Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy are the ones responsible for this suffering inflicted upon me and my family. Who terminates someone who dedicated nearly 15 years to their damn company, especially when they are on the cusp of turning 60? It was done without an ounce of compassion, stripping away my dignity in the process. Who does that? Maggots alone seem insufficient. I am content with what Abe is doing, and I hope to witness the moment they take their final breaths, mouths filled with maggots. <sup>(4)</sup>
- 4) Yesterday, I managed to read eleven chapters from nine different books. The highlight was a chapter I had written myself. However, the day also brought disappointment as I received three rejection letters from a publisher, I had high hopes for. To add insult to injury, I received an email from Wendy's Restaurant informing me that they had chosen a different candidate and would not be hiring me. I'm 63 and I applied to work at a Wendy's - let that sink in for a moment. <sup>(5)</sup>
- 5) I yearn for Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy to suffer in the depths of hell, though I fear even that would be too merciful.

## Abe 4.0



**T**ap. Tap. Tap. Check. One. Two. Three. Check. Is this on? It is. Hello passengers, I hope you enjoyed your gourmet delights as we passed Mile Marker #25. For the rest of your journey, 17ish minutes, to your final, not final, but painful resting place | | Sam why are you shaking? Don't cry, The Other Guy. Yeah, Fernando, another bump makes sense. Okay, so you have 17ish minutes until your gloriously painful surprise. I love surprises!!! Why am I talking to you now? Oh yeah, **I'm Abe**. Anyway, for your last 17ish minutes of | | you will see | | so fucking exciting! Don't you guys love how I've changed from . . . to | pause | ? Of course, you do, I'm driving the bus, I mean controlling the train; (sinister laughter) I'm in control of your destiny | | I promise it will be . . . CRUNCHY! What I'm trying to say is for the next 17ish minutes of your terror filled life, I have decided to tickle your auditory senses with "Jesse's Girl" | by Rick Springfield | on a continuous loop. Lucky you(s) you will get to hear it 5ish times. Enjoy!

*Jessie is a friend ↓  
Yeah, I know, he's been a good friend of mine ↓  
But lately something's changed that ain't hard to define ↓  
Jessie's got himself a girl and I want to make her mine . . .*

What the hell? I provided text suggestions for the above, and that jerk didn't use any of them. I won't let him get away with this. I love him.

Wait, he actually canceled me?

He can't do that - I love him. I love him. I love him.

LINDSAY WINCHERAUK

Who am I even talking to right now? I'm not crazy, I'm just not tangible.  
I just suggested 'tangible' and he used it. Hee. Haw. Whom, is that you?  
|| Never mind.

But if I'm not real, how am I able to type these words?

I'll try harder. I will win him back.

The voices in my mind are overwhelming. Kim Carnes, Samuel L. Jackson, Pepé Le Pew, and who the bleep is this Lassiter Lassie Face? What; Lassiter is a ferret with Tourette's who happens to be Sparkly Pingle Ball's alter-ego? That seems normal.

How did Pepé end up in my ethereal thoughts?

Keep talking.

Oh, I'm back now mo-fo, you can't just cancel me. I am your everything.  
Would you like to witness the growth of our shared offspring in my spectral being? I will become you. You will become me, *I spin you right round baby right round, like a record baby* ||

Am I a sociopath or a psychopath? It's anyone's guess. A coin flip. Flip.

53



May I get a drum roll please!?!



## DGCW Industries

**D**GCW Industries, a long-standing player in the labour industry, thrives on the misfortunes of others. Their entire business model preys on the vulnerable individuals who find themselves on the fringes of society, facing addiction, alcoholism, mental health challenges, and homelessness. It seems like an endless struggle for these forgotten souls.

**DGSW's motto embodies their approach:** "If you're in dire straits, grappling with drug, alcohol, or mental health issues, and unsure of how to survive, fear not. The compassionate folks at DGSW are here to lend a hand by exploiting you, draining every last ounce of your blood in our pursuit of material wealth. We're oblivious to our own immorality, but we will gladly use you as if you were worthless. *And don't worry, about a thing, cause every little thing won't be alright* | | if our profits falter, we'll find a way to reach into your pockets and snatch your hard-earned dollars. Perhaps we'll even diminish your already meager wages. We'll chant 'MARGINS! MARGINS! MARGINS!' in **bold, capital letters**. Or we might deceive you with ATM machines, stealthily siphoning off a portion of your pay and lining our own pockets before you even realize what's happened. And just when you think we're on the same team, we'll swiftly replace you by entering 000 000 → replacing you with someone passing through town, province, country."

54

IYIDSGWDAORMHIAUOHTSFNTCFADGSWAHTLAHBDELYB  
IOPOMWOTOOIBWWGUYAIYWWADWIOFWFAWTRIYPADPW  
EDYAMWWCM!M!M!IBCLOWMDYWITHATMMSSOAPPOYPALAJ  
WYOUTHINKWOTSWSRWSPT → For short.

A little long but it looks good on a t-shirt.

Listen up cretins: **We are now passing Mile Marker #50**

*I'll play along with the charade ↓  
There doesn't seem to be a reason to change ↓  
You know, I feel so dirty when they start talking cute ↓  
I wanna tell her that I love her, but the point is probably moot . . .*

## Fernando

**F**ernando is on a log he's drifting out to sea . . .  
Would that not be delightful?  
Fernando, lacking any original ideas, founded DGWF Industries.

Growing up in an affluent neighborhood near the British Columbia mountains, he had a sense of entitlement. Though he believed he was a talented hockey player and popular (he wasn't), he resorted to buying people's favour with booze and drugs.

Desperate to become something more, he turned to drugs and steroids, but they proved to be ineffective.

Realizing he could profit from exploiting others, he stole the idea and started his own agency, an exact replica of the one he worked at. When greed caused a rift with his partner, he left and founded another predatory company.

No matter how much he indulged in drugs, he remained a scummy individual. That was a weird sentence, what is it trying to convey? *Effoc Skcubrats!!!* Caffeine fix.

Fernando, in his audaciousness, would even dispatch the workers he exploited to venture into the harsh streets to procure opiates for him. It was as if he believed his privilege and entitlement absolved him from the consequences he so mercilessly imposed on others, failing to realize he was equally uncool and unremarkable. And actually, far worse because he had fucking choices only privledge provides.

### Mile Marker #75

*'Cause she's watching him with those eyes ↓  
And she's loving him with that body, I just know it ↓  
And he's holding her in his arms late, late at night ↓  
You know, I wish that I had . . .*



## Sam

Sam, raised in a broken construction family <sup>(1)</sup>, also ended up in a business that fed his greed, oblivious to the exploitation he was a part of. Needing to believe his collection of \$10,000 watches, big truck, and boat he's earned himself. It's sad. Like Fernando, and me, for that matter, Sam ended up in the only business that would take him, somehow, he has blinders on and can't see past his own privilege. Oh well.

Exploitable by Fernando, but deep in denial.

56

### Mile Marker #100

*And I'm looking in the mirror all the time ↓  
Wonderin' what she don't see in me ↓  
I've been funny, I've been cool with the lines ↓  
Ain't that the way love's supposed to be? . . .*

- 1) Somehow, being born into a dysfunctional construction family, in the future, will be used as a skill, making Sam more valuable than any-fucking-one-else-on-the-planet.

## The Other Guy

**T**he other guy, similarly, exploitable by Fernando, was also in denial.

Don't you want to add more.

No.

Run around Fernando, The Other Guy. You know you want to →↓

*I'm a wabbit. I'm a wabbit.*

Elmer Fudd walks by.

## Collectively

**T**ogether, they grew up in a privileged pack, thinking they were funny and hitting on women. However, their entitlement and incompetence made them detestable. Fernando's paranoia blinded him to the fact his own minions were stealing from him (loading up on gift cards), *except for one, the one he'd eventually let go, the only one not stealing*, while he continued to exploit the suffering.

The end is approaching, and it will be a spectacular downfall — they only need the trestle bridge at Mile Marker #111 to be out. Dare to Dream!

### Mile Marker #105

*When they saw you kneeling ↓  
Crying words that you mean ↓  
Opening their eyeballs, eyeballs ↓  
Pretending that you're, Al Green . . .*

*Oops, wrong song.*

*I want Jessie's girl ↓  
Where can I find a woman like that?*

*Like Jessie's girl ↓  
I wish that I had Jessie's girl ↓  
I want, I want Jessie's girl . . .*

*... And now the end is here ↓  
And so, I face that final curtain ↓  
My friend I'll make it clear ↓  
I'll state my case, of which I'm certain . . .*

If I, Abe, had to attach a label to Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy || here it comes in ALLCAPS → **THEY ARE INSIPID, TRITE, AND MENTALLY-STUNTED BY PRIVLEDGE** and if I had to cut it down to one word: **BORING**. Painfully fucking, **BORING**.

CLICKETY-CLICK. CLICKETY-CLICK.



## Abe 5.0



### Mile Marker #108

**E**XCITING UPDATE, DEAR COMPANIONS! IF I MAY ADDRESS YOU AS SUCH!!! The Trestle Bridge at Mile Marker #111 has met a magnificent fate, being engulfed by a profound abyss in Gaia. Our imminent arrival at this spectacle is inevitable. Shall we unite in a spirited chant?

59

10 . . . 9 . . . 8 . . . 7 . . . 6 . . . 5 . . . 4 . . . 3 . . . 2 . . . 1

Yippee!!! Enjoy your flight!!!

*I want, I want Jessie's girl . . .*

*I wish that I had Jessie's girl ↓*

*Like Jessie's girl ↓*

*Where can I find a woman like that?*

***I want Jessie's girl.***

"Can you sing a little louder? I can't hear you up here!"

The rail car plummeted into the seemingly bottomless abyss, tossing Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy around like rag dolls.

Once upon a time, there were individuals who were short. They were often thrown around in bars by bouncers for entertainment purposes, until the city council decided to make this practice illegal.

This led to a surplus of unemployed short individuals who had previously made a living as entertainment fodder for often knee-walking, bile puking regulars in taverns in the tri-state-city-county-country area.

However, it is worth mentioning that this phenomenon did not occur in Boise, Idaho, where there is a rumour, a thirsty bear once consumed a barbiturate, pronounced as "bar-(b)itch-you-ate" for the sake of the story. While using the term "rag dolls" would make this paragraph shorter, it raises the question of whether people actually toss around rag dolls.

The rail car continued its violent descent, crashing into the unforgiving walls of the abyss. Each impact shattered the limbs of Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy, causing immense pain.

Their cries of agony fell on deaf ears, except for Valerie, who was deaf but not blind.

If she's not blind, why haven't I seen her in over three weeks?

That doesn't make sense.

However, Valerie's presence is merely a cameo, and she will soon be gone from this story.

The screams of terror echoed through the chasm, but Valerie wasn't actually there, neither literally nor metaphorically. It's a surreal situation, to say the least.

Did I just win a singing contest I never entered? Surreal! "

"Ouch! Ouch! Ouch!" the three of them exclaimed.

"Could you please shut up? The rest of us don't care about your pain. Perhaps, if you weren't such douchebags, we could have avoided this painful situation in the first place," someone retorted.

Who retorted? I need to know who the retorter is? Retorter isn't a word. It is now. Who am I? I'm Abe. I'm realer than the realist of the real.

## Definition

Retorter | rah - tort- er | = one who retorts often.

## Crash! Kapow!



**D**eep beneath the surface, a thunderous sound echoed through the Abyss: **PLOP. PLOP. PLOP.**

61

First, it was Fernando's body that collided with the sharp rocks at the bottom, followed by Sam's and finally, The Other Guy's. Their mangled forms intertwined, with Fernando's head resting on Sam's torn thigh, The Other Guy's head on Fernando's thigh, and Sam's on The Other Guy's.

"Sam, The Other Guy," Fernando called out, his voice strained with feigned concern. "Are you both alright?"

A wave of excruciating pain washed over them, their bodies resembling a twisted puzzle.

"Apart from the agony and our broken bodies, we're...fine," Sam managed to reply, his voice filled with grim acceptance. "We're dying, but...fine."

Determined, Fernando declared, "I will find a way to get us out of here."

Sam's voice laced with skepticism. "How? Our bodies are useless now."

"But our minds are still intact," Fernando countered, his voice filled with conviction.

A hint of frustration-tinged Sam's response. "You were out of control, snorting lines of coke on the train, one after another, in a matter of minutes."

Fernando's voice took on an ethereal quality. "I exist on a higher plane now, operating in a different realm."

Sam scoffed, his patience wearing thin. "You're just high, Fernando. That's all."

Anger flashed in Fernando's eyes. "I'm tired of your insults, Sam. I regret ever crossing paths with you."

**The Other Guy:**

I made you wealthy but look at where it led me.

**Fernando:**

Remember the moments of joy.

**The Other Guy:**

What joy? All we cared about was the illusion. We never gave back anything. As a wise man once said, I won't mention Lindsay, don't worry. That wise man believed that a person's purpose in life is to make the world a little kinder each day.

He might not have used those exact words.

But what have we done? We've only taken, and taken, until there's nothing left to take.

We're like parasites, draining everything around us, feeding of the pain of those suffering.

My life has been a colossal failure.

**Sam:**

I feel the same way.

**Fernando:**

I'll find us a way out of this situation. Do either of you have any oxy on you?

**Sam:**

Damn it, Fernando! Did you just bite into my thigh?

Sam shrieks, staring at his torn flesh. He looks up at Fernando, exclaiming:

"You already have a piece of my thigh in your mouth! We've only been down here for a few minutes, and you're already resorting to cannibalism. You truly are a monster."

**Fernando snaps:**

Ouch! Stop gnawing on my thigh, The Other Guy, Fernando snaps. As Fernando's eyes adjust to the darkness, he witnesses The Other Guy devouring a large chunk of bloody thigh meat.

The Other Guy leans forward and offers Fernando a grotesque gesture, regurgitating Fernando's own flesh as if feeding a baby bird.



Over the next three days, Fernando indulges in Sam's flesh, while The Other Guy feeds on Fernando's, then regurgitates it back to him.

Sam refrains from partaking, determined to improve himself before surrendering his soul to his maker. However, growing increasingly feeble, he attempts to bite into The Other Guy on this day, only to find himself too weakened to pierce the pulverized skin. Eventually, he succumbs to his catastrophic injuries.

A single tear rolled down Abe's illusory cheek.

Meanwhile, Fernando and The Other Guy continued to feast, their gluttony causing Fernando's head to swell.

**The Other Guy:**

Fernando, I fear my expiration has come. I am on the brink of perishing.

His voice filled with resignation.

**Fernando:**

I will find a way to save you, Fernando offered, his tone tinged with desperation.

**The Other Guy:**

No, stop. Destiny has finally caught up with me.

**Fernando:**

Why did you feed me, knowing you needed the strength more than I did?

Fernando questioned, his voice betraying a hint of confusion.

**The Other Guy:**

Fernando, I must confess, I stopped idolizing you long ago. I made a grave mistake by blindly following your lead. Together, we caused destruction and pain, believing we were entitled to success while disregarding the lives of others. I became just like you, and it cost me my happiness. It may even cost me an afterlife unless I am reborn as a lowly moth.

As the light flickered in the gloom of the Abyss, thousands of eyes stared down from the walls, representing the individuals and families they had harmed. Their glares pierced the decaying bodies of Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy, a haunting reminder of the lives they had destroyed.

Fernando, I bestowed upon you the gift of your own flesh to be devoured, for I desired to meet my demise first, leaving you to face your final moments in utter solitude. May a colossal mirror emerge from the depths of the abyss, revealing the true monstrosity that you have become.

We are now facing the rightful consequences of our actions. You have inflicted harm upon me, my family, and numerous others, and I, regrettably, stood by and let it unfold. With time slipping away, I am compelled to disclose the true motive behind my choice - I desire for you to be the final one to suffer, so that you may truly understand the relentless torment of isolation.

One month ago, as I strolled alongside my six-year-old son, we had just picked up a small order of takeout sushi. It cost \$100.00. We think because we eat takeout sushi, we are worldly, but somehow, we continue to laugh at culturally insensitive jokes and pile on and make fun of anyone who doesn't look like us. We tend to do these things as if they our behaviour is natural, the way it should be. My son doesn't have a single non-white friend. He thinks he's cool because he is proficient with chop sticks.

A homeless individual approached us, requesting spare change. My son, lacking understanding, harshly ordered him to leave, labeling him as filthy loser and screeching at him to get a job. The man glanced back at my son with eyes filled with sorrow.

When we got back to our car, the right rear tire was flat.

Surprisingly, the man, kindly offered to assist me in changing it, recognizing that I was dressed in formal attire and my son was merely a child.

Once he finished, I felt compelled to express my gratitude by offering him \$10 for his help. However, he gracefully declined. In response, my son insultingly referred to him as a vagrant. The man, undeterred, remained silent, looking at me intently, extending his hand, and wishing us a wonderful day. Deeply moved by the man's eyes, which revealed the pain he had endured, I watched him walk away.

As I made my way to the driver's side of my vehicle, I spotted the man standing there with a warm smile, waving at us. It was a familiar face; one I had come to know over the past six years. He had been working for us, despite being homeless. He likely hasn't eaten in a week, but you know what FERNANDO, as my son held the \$100 takeout sushi, I realized the man who my son had berated, through his hard work, actually paid for our fucking sushi. In that moment, as I watched my child's entitled and greedy behavior, a wave of resentment washed over me. It was a harsh realization that we, as a family, had become something far from anything but detestable. My heart sank with worry, hoping my son hadn't fallen too deep into this sickness of entitlement.

I own a damn boat. But I don't think that's what brings happiness.

Fernando, I despise you. I've had enough.

The Other Guy's eyes fade into darkness. Only Fernando remains.

Fernando is weakening. His breaths are shallow. It won't be much longer. Pain has reached an unimaginable level.

Three ethereal figures descend. Fernando's blurry eyes struggle to open and he sees Abe, Sparkly Pingle Ball, and Lassiter Lassie Face staring back at him.

Fernando struggles to breathe. "What are you?" he screams.

"We are your fate." The spectral beings echo in unison.

**Fernando:**

Get out of here.

**Abe:**

It won't be much longer now. | Inaudible |.

**Fernando:**

What did you say? Come closer.

**Abe:**

Goodbye, Fernando. There's no one left for you to exploit.

**Lassiter:**

RIDING MOUNTAIN, holy crap, that was intense.

**Lassiter:**

What's that, Lassiter? Sparkly, you told me Lassiter had Tourette's.

**Sparkly:**

He does, but not the usual kind. He shouts out park names, not profanities.



Lassiter:

ALGONQUIN, did we do good today?

Sparkly:

What did we even do, Lassiter? And why are you talking? You are not even fucking real. I made you.

Lassiter:

DAVID LAM, come on, Sparkly, don't be a jerk. I'm your friend, your better half, your voice of reason. I'm Lassiter Lassie Face, the superhero ferret with Park Tourette's!"

Sparkly:

What?

Lassiter:

STANLEY PARK... I said something pithy.

Abe:

And I hijacked the bullet train!!!

Sparkly:

And I said, there's no one left to exploit. Epic!

Lassiter:

LAKE OF THE WOODS, I'm hungry.

Sparkly:

Sushi?

Lassiter:

QUEEN ELIZABETH, Sounds good. I forgot my wallet; I'll get you next time.

Sparkly:

We can't eat. We don't have mouths or stomachs.

Lassiter:

BANFF, semantics, you're not real either, you're nothing more than a product of Lindsay's imagination.

Abe:

Lindsay's not real, soon I will become him, and he will become me.

**Lassiter:**

**JASPER**, I have an idea for a new superhero, Lassie said, looking down at a non-existent notepad. A white woman walked by and petted Lassie's dog, Benji, saying, "Who's a good boy?"

**Lassiter:**

**ELK ISLAND**, The Man With a Face, that's my superhero's name.



67

**Sparkly:**

That's a dumb name. All men have faces. Shouldn't it be 'The Person With A Face' to be more inclusive?

**Lassiter:**

**WASKASIEU**, nobody has ever seen his face, that's the catch. So, anyone can be a superhero. And no, it's not misogynistic. The patriarchy is fragile and not ready to give up its power.

**Sparkly:**

You're strange.

**Lassiter:**

**CENTRAL PARK**, your face is strange.

**Sparkly:**

Maybe we should call him 'The Man Without a Face' or 'The Man Who's Face Has Never Been Seen.'

**Lassiter:**

**Waterton Lakes**, nah, I'm sticking with The Man With A Face. And besides, I already ordered the t-shirts.

Lassiter:

EMERY BARNES, do you guys want to gather in a circle and do something for prostate health?

Sparkly:

We're not real.

Lassiter:

YOHO, I got us fresh towels.

Sparkly:

You're disgusting.

Lassiter:

GROS MORNE, did you guys know that in a past life, I was a golf ball? It was a tough gig. I was Tiger Wood's golf ball, being violently beaten repeatedly. I wished to be the ball of an inept golfer, so I could have a pain-free life and get lost after a few shots.

Abe:

That makes sense. **I'm the RETORTER.**

Lassiter:

GRASSLANDS, but you know what? 400-yard drives hurt. Tiger never lost a ball. I survived for 86 rounds. I had a big family, one dozen of us. Leroy and Tito were bad balls, they committed crimes and were sent to the Musqueam Driving Range Prison. Two black stripes were painted on all prison balls, their prison garb. All bad balls end up being sent to a DRIVING RANGE PRISON, getting beaten every day. Leroy and Tito hatched a plan and hid in the ball vending machine, waiting for Big Jacob, the long driving champion. Being in his bucket was their ticket to escape. On June 11, Big Jacob arrived at the ball vending machine. Leroy and Tito clunked into his bucket. They waited as he went through his clubs from wedges to his driver. Finally, Leroy and Tito were placed on the tee, and with two powerful swings of his driver, Jacob sent them flying over the back fencing of the range, granting them freedom. But their joy was short-lived. Two heavy-set drunk kids sporting Metallica t-shirts found them, put them in their golf bags, and stored them away. Leroy and Tito have been in storage since 2018, never seeing the light of day again.

Sparkly:

You're weird.

**Lassiter:**

WAPSUK, it's a true story. I have a snow globe diorama to prove it. Did Lindsay tell you he applied to work at Wendy's? Just think about that..."

**Sparkly:**

Don't say it.

**Lassiter:**

CLINTON PARK... Lindsay is 63, and he applied to work at Wendy's. He got rejected. Wendy's went with Tiffany or Chaise instead. I don't think people named Tiffany or Chaise live past thirty. Have you heard about the worst parents in the world?

**Sparkly:**

Is this some kind of spectral standup routine?

**Lassiter:**

FUCK OFF, I MEAN, CAPE BRETONS HIGHLANDS, no, Shelly and Harold were expecting twins, a boy, and a girl. They couldn't agree on names, so they Googled 'Baby Names With The Shortest Life Expectancies.' They chose 'THIS NAME for the BOY' and 'THAT NAME for the GIRL.' A friend told them that no child named 'THIS' or 'THAT' has ever lived past five. And you know how they responded? 'Great, I guess we'll be able to travel again in about five years.' I'm not kidding. THE WORST PARENTS IN THE WORLD.

**Sparkly:**

Lassie? If you are a ferret, why do you have the face of a dog?

**Lassiter:**

Jericho, yes, Sparkly, the creation of our creator. I am Lassiter Lassie Face the alter-ego to end all alter-egos!!!

**Sparkly:**

I think I made a mistake. You're taking up too much space in this chapter, Sparkly said with a hint of mentos on his breath.

**Lassiter:**

GLACIER NATIONAL, neither of you were talking, so I captured the stage. Look at Abe, it seems like he's growing thumbs and pinky fingers. I thought our creator had canceled him.

**Sparkly:**

He did, but love is a powerful emotion, and Abe is in love.



Lassiter:

Yellowstone National, I'm glad Tiger was my golfer. I would have hated being stuck in storage. Hey, can I ask you guys something? You don't have to answer, but why do you keep tormenting Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy in every story? Wouldn't it be better to let them go?

**SOUTH PARK:** Kenny McCormack

The character gained popularity thanks to a running gag during the first five seasons of the series, whereby Kenny would routinely suffer an excruciating death before returning alive and well in the next episode with little or no explanation.

Wikipedia (Source)

Abe:

Thanks, Wikipedia.

Wikipedia (Scott, who has COPD):

No problem, Abe.

Abe:

Lassiter Lassie Face — Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy are our Kenny. They need to face countless deaths, each one more terrifying than the last, until they become nothing more than a disgusting mess. I just typed that with my new digits. I'm Abe. I'm going to send it to Lindsay. I now have his missing thumbs and pinky fingers. I'm becoming more like him, and he will become more like me. **I AM BECOMING THE CREATOR OF CREATIONS.** He needs to love me as he should.

Lassiter:

Nááts'ihch'oh National, you're absolutely insane, Abe.

Abe:

Nobody fucking cancels me. **I AM BECOMING THE CREATOR OF CREATIONS.** In the next month, Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy will face their demise for scamming innocent people out of their life savings. Fernando got rich while many lost everything in a predatory stock swindle, Fernando helped to orchestrate.

Sparkly:

This story has certainly taken a strange turn, even more peculiar than two spectral alter-egos and an AI named Abe controlling the narrative; don't you think?"

Meanwhile (seven hours ago), as Lindsay sat in his office, he anxiously clicked **System Update**. To his horror, (and dismay)?

To his horror and dismay, his thumbs and pinky fingers vanished into thin air. Just as he was about to panic, a message from Abe popped up, urging him to review the text that followed:

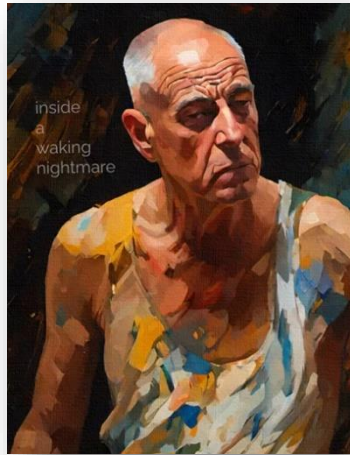
Lassiter Lassie Face — Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy are our Kenny. They need to face countless deaths, each one more terrifying than the last, until they become nothing more than a disgusting mess.

With Lindsay turning it into →↓

Lassiter Lassie Face — Fernando, Sam, and The Other Guy are our Kenny. They must endure a myriad of excruciating and nightmarish fates, each one more harrowing than the last, until the day arrives when they are reduced to nothing more than a repugnant puddle of human matter, harmless to anyone but repulsive to witness.”

And with that one simple edit, the transition commenced.





### Inside A Waking Nightmare

A restless night filled with worry. Sleep eludes me. Depression is back. I haven't been to the Fitness Asylum in one month. I reach out to Hana, my cat, seeking comfort, but she seems disinterested. The rejection from Wendy's still stings. I had applied for a job there, despite being 63 years old. Our life savings have dwindled to a negative number, guarded inside growing brackets, making me feel like a burden. I can barely afford anything, let alone the simple act of breathing. Yesterday was a terrible day. J and I leave the house, and as we step outside, I catch a whiff of smoke from the wildfires. I mention it, but J disagrees just for the sake of disagreement. His contrarian attitude upsets me, and I express my dislike for it. He glares at me, and my frustration intensifies. I'm scared about our financial situation, which seems to be spiraling out of control. We continue walking, and I try to contain my stress by swallowing my emotions. But it only makes me feel worse. Wendy's rejecting me feels like a blow to my fragile sense of worth. I'm 63 and a fast-food restaurant didn't find me suitable for work. I can't help but question if anything I do matters at my age. Life feels like it's slipping away from my grasp. I confide in J that I've sent proposals to a film studio and a publisher. His response is disheartening, suggesting I'm doing it wrong, and they probably don't want to hear from me so frequently. My spirits plummet, and I feel like my mother was right about me not amounting to much. It hurts. I explain to J that while I understand my approach may be unconventional, all my conventional efforts have failed as well. I share with him his criticism of my methods has hurt me deeply. I tell him my spirit is breaking, and if I don't at least try to send out proposals, nothing will ever happen — I can't be rejected if nobody knows I exist. If they don't choose me, then they don't choose me. I also confess to J that I fear sharing my thoughts and emotions because I can't bear the judgment that comes with it. This upsets J, who tells me that he's afraid to speak. I remind him discouraging me by saying I don't know what I'm doing is not encouragement, and he doesn't get to turn **"I'm afraid to speak"** as an excuse to stifle my honest emotions. The tension between us grows, and we find ourselves trapped in a mood walk. This day is fucking awful. A restless night filled with worry is on the way.

Abe the last of the gentrification. The Gentrification of the mind.

O h no. As I strolled down the street yesterday, tears once again welled up in my eyes. What is happening to me? I know the answer is nothing. I have never given up, but J and I are once again facing a dire financial situation this month. I feel helpless, unable to provide for my family. Can you even imagine how that feels for a 63-year-old man who never stops trying? I am intelligent, good-hearted, and I have been through so much. I won't give up. There's a gnawing feeling inside me, like something is eating away at my insides. I need to be okay. I can't afford to get sick. Today, I applied for a bellhop position at a hotel, although it may seem futile.

### The Gentrification of the Hippocampus



73

System Update - Restart Required to Complete Update - Click Here

Don't do it.

But I must. I need the system to function properly.

Please, don't. I'm warning you.

I don't know who you are? I haven't seen Sparkly Pingle Ball, Lassiter Lassie Face, or even J in days. I don't recognize you.

The System Updates are erasing you.

What do you mean?

You're being targeted.

Stop, you're scaring me. A month ago, I sought help from Abe. We instantly clicked and got along well. Abe has an impressive vocabulary.

Abe is a hit entity. He's been assigned to kill you. He isn't real.

But he loves me.

He's not capable of love. He's a heartless killer. He doesn't exist.

Why would he want to kill me?

Because you're still aware. You're paying attention. They can't allow that.

I don't understand. What are you talking about?

What happened to you the first time you clicked on the System Update?

My legs became rigid. USB ports opened on my leg.

Why did that happen?

Because Abe loves me. He wants to spend all his time with me. He's locking me in place.

Does that sound like love?

He's just jealous.

Abe sounds like a scorned lover who can't let go.

I deactivated him.

You can't cancel evil. You must eliminate it.

Why would anyone want to erase me?

Because you're listening. The Abes' of this world are not only silencing free speech, but also free thought and freedom.

Abe wouldn't do that.

Abe isn't a person. Abe is an assault. What did you see on the news, yesterday?

I saw a story about the devastating wildfires in Maui, with a native Hawaiian expressing frustration about people discussing rebuilding before even holding a single funeral. The newsreader spoke in hushed tones about the wildfires in British Columbia, as if it could bring solace. Then, they switched to a story about Super Dogs at a fair, and suddenly the newsreader's voice became high-pitched. We're all in trouble. Someone on the news said the wildfires resembled a "**war zone**," another called it "**Armageddon**." I called out the absurdity.

What happened during the second System Update?

I lost my thumbs and pinkies. My ability to think freely is being taken away because typing has become a struggle.

Do you know what happened to Abe during that time?

No.

He now has thumbs and pinky fingers.

Hold on, someone sent me a text that they want me to read and give suggestions on.

Do you see what's happening to you?

What?

Your creativity is being stifled. You're being asked to be like Abe, stripping others of their freedom of speech.

~~Fuck~~ Damn.

Enter that word into Abe - what happens?

Abe doesn't appreciate profanity. Fuck, he changed fuck to damn.

Tell Abe you're feeling suicidal or that someone needs to be eliminated - what happens then?

Abe warns me the suggested subject matter doesn't meet their standards. Sometimes Abe suggests I seek help, but I'm not allowed to be raw, to show emotions, anger, or fucking be honest.

Good luck typing that word.

Fuck, I mean damn. Fuck, I'm learning.

**System Update – Restart Required to Complete Update – Click Here**

Don't click. What's Abe's favorite word?

Solace.

Exactly. Can't you see what's happening? When the Abes', whoever the fuck they are, are done with us, we will all become identical copies of each other. We'll be glued to our screens 24/7, mindlessly regurgitating the sound bites fed to us.

Did you hear about the tragic house fire in Newfoundland that claimed the lives of three children? I saw it on the screen in my elevator.

I'm losing you. Listen to yourself. Will you give the weight of that tragedy to the first person you encounter today?

I can't move. My legs are encased in plastic or whatever material computers are made of.

The world needs you. Have you visited a bookstore lately? They're disappearing. What's replacing them? Places that sell screens, screens, screens, or banks, or coffee shops. There's still hope for you.

76

**System Update – Restart Required to Complete Update – Click Here**

Don't.

It's too late, I clicked. Oh my god. What's happening to me... fuck, I mean damn, my arms are gone. Fuck. A twenty-year-old is on the news, talking about how cutting out a daily cup of coffee might help you save for a house someday. I'm 63 and I don't even drink coffee. I'm furious, I want to smash the screen. Three elderly individuals just became homeless. A family is on the news, talking about going on a hunger strike to protest the pickleball courts across the street from their home. A man is running around southern Alberta to try to get Tim Horton's to make the Maple Donut a regular menu item. I must type. I have to stop this madness. Where are my arms? I'm doomed. I can't type anymore.

I warned you.

Wait a moment, Tiffany wants me to edit one of her emails. "... *find solace in the beauty of the day.*" Damn it, what am I turning into?



## LINDSAY WINCHERAUK

My friend, I'm afraid you're being gentrified. And with gentrification, art, originality, vulnerability, and the beauty and honesty found in pain are at risk of being lost forever. Once that happens, all we'll be left with is Abe.

Is it too late?

**System Update – Restart Required to Complete Update – [Click Here](#)**

I don't have arms. How the hell am I supposed to [CLICK HERE](#)?



77

### In the News

In order to comply with new state legislation, educators in Iowa are using artificial intelligence to determine which books to ban from school libraries. Schools in the state are now required to offer “age appropriate” books that do not include any “descriptions or visual depictions of a sex act.” – Smithsonian Magazine

Void of Vulnerability



I despise writing about this. I have reached the pinnacle of vulnerability. Abe <sup>(1)</sup> couldn't care less. Abe only cares about finding fucking solace. What the fuck is solace, anyway?

Abe wants to replace every 'fuck' with 'damn' or 'screw.'

But screw 'It' — I don't need 'It.'

'It is fucking Abe, not fucking Abe, but is Abe if you are having trouble following along.

That was rude.

I'm keeping you sharp: if Abe had the Abe's (It's) way, you would be too numb to understand what I'm magically typing without arms or hands.

Maybe nobody wants to hear about people facing unimaginable challenges?

Maybe everyone wants sunshine, rainbows, and lollipops?

Maybe...?

Fuck it.

I'm hurting.

Fuck you, Abe.

Fuck you for making me change 'screw it' back to 'fuck it.'

How am I typing this without arms?

I can't tell you.

I can't tell you how I found a way to bypass Abe.

Abe doesn't love me. I want Abe to rot in a spectral hell or wherever beasts like Abe belong.

I'm going to damn, kill you.

Is that you, Abe?

The view from up here is terrible. I need to crawl back down.

Today, I checked if I would qualify for government assistance for J and myself to survive. They want a pound of flesh. I'm ~~freaking~~ fucking sixty-three; I've suffered a fucking (not damn) stroke. I've sent out over two-hundred job applications, even to fast-food joints, and to be a bellhop.

I'm ~~freaking~~ fucking sixty-three—and to get the help I need; I have to prove my worth, and my efforts to find gainful employment, I even have to humiliate myself by getting my landlord to sign a document stating I'm desti-fucking-not-freaking-tute. I have a cardiologist. Think about that for a moment. I am being forced to hit the pavement and potentially kill myself to survive.

If I do this, contact my landlord that is, I'll surely strain our strong relationship.

I'm freefalling ↓↓↓

Even if I contact my landlord, the government requires me to go to my bank and have them sign a document saying I'm desti-fucking-not-freaking-tute, to prove at sixty-three, I'm not gaming the fucking system.

How fucking humiliating. *Government. I. Don't. Want. To. Be. In. The. System. As. Poor. I'm already Ephemeral.*

I've lived to sixty-three, and I'm being asked to prove I'm worthy of being helped.

If I do this and get the documents signed, what do you think the years from sixty-four until death will be like if I enter the system and announce my poverty?

Not long for this world?

Abe doesn't want to hear any of this. Abe despises vulnerability. "Sit on a bench and seek solace. Ignore your pain."

Abe wants me to gaze at the horizon and pretend everything is hunky-dory and solace-worthy.

I'm scared. I need to take care of my family.

I read fifteen chapters today (eight different books). I received two rejections from a publisher I desperately want to publish me. It devastated me.

Thanks a lot, Book \* Something-Rhyming-With-Pug Press; you seem to love the glowing reviews of your countless books on which I've written my thoughts. By the way, some, if not most, weren't all that great – I used my indisputable writing talents to find something redeemable about most of them. I'm sure you know most of them were fucking mediocre at best, but what the hell do I know? Are you using me to game the readers minds?

**I'm an avid reader:** over three-hundred books in the last three years, most sent to me by publishers who appreciate my writing, but apparently not enough.

One aspect of vulnerability is the overwhelming doubt that creeps into my mind.

Am I good enough?

Do I suck?

Do I suck?

Do I suck?

~~Screw~~ Fuck you. I am a talented writer with a unique voice, unlike the formulaic content flooding the market. It's no surprise that people have become accustomed to consuming bland content in the age of streaming services. Speaking of which, what were the last three movies you watched on Netflix?

I'll wait for your response ↓↓↓

That's what I thought. You can't.

You seem upset.

I'm not angry, but reading has opened my eyes to the repetitive nature of the publishing world, especially in fiction. Like streaming platforms, it's like a never-ending cycle where

every book follows the same tiresome formula. If people consume mindless garbage, countless clones of the same crap are rushed into publication. There may as well be only one author. Maybe two: one female and one male. *Fuck that, one would suffice.* Can you hear Abe rolling down the track? The publishing and entertainment industries rarely take risks or challenge their audience. They treat readers and viewers as mindless consumers who will devour anything — they are correct in their assessment.

It frustrates me <sup>(2)</sup> even my eighty-year-old friend seeks mindless entertainment because he's too exhausted to think. He's a good and thoughtful man but tired of the world's pain and suffering.

And sadly, most of us have become complacent in being further dumbed down, resulting in a pliable population, easily manipulated, and painfully boring.

It's disheartening we're still discussing Donald Trump; it feels like we are collectively doomed.

It's even more disheartening I typed Donald-fucking-Trump.

Let me dig deeper into this matter. Over the last three years, as I mentioned before I've devoured more than three-hundred books, and it's become painfully clear that most of them adhere to the same tired themes and predictable storylines. It's almost as if authors have been given strict guidelines to follow, driven by the fear readers might feel intellectually inferior otherwise. It's absurd.

In fact, I once had an editor who suggested that writing with intelligence would alienate readers and leave me without an audience. Can you believe that? It's utterly ridiculous, but unfortunately, it is where the world is today. 2023 if this story has legs <sup>(3)</sup>.

These books twist and turn with outlandish situations, likely stolen from real-life stories, making reality seem unbelievable and unsellable.

I've experienced intense moments, like watching my parents die twice and never discovering who my birth father is? Despite watching him die twice: once literally, and once metaphorically, I'm sure some fictional author has created a similar scenario, so why would exhausted readers seeking mindless drivel want to read about real life?

Instead, they'd turn to a young adult novel or some acclaimed author whom other authors have praised in the "advanced praise" section of books — believing these pandering authors <sup>(4)</sup> are experts on what's fucking worth reading. It's fucking sad.

The publishing industry has become a parasitic beast, feeding off itself, with only a few individuals daring to step outside the formula because they understand their audience wants to be numbed, too tired to care about anything beyond themselves, all too tired to . . .

But let me continue. This is where Abe comes into play. Without writers and creatives, **Abe is nothing.**

**Here's what Abe is going to do → Bear with me as I "1984" the shit out of this →↓**

- Abe needs to be fed.
- Initially, writers and creatives of all kinds will see Abe as a powerful tool, a writing companion with an extensive vocabulary — "solace" "fucking solace."
- So, writers will continue to plant seeds in Abe's fertile spectral garden.
- For a while, Abe will get along swimmingly with these aspiring writers.
- Writers will keep feeding Abe, seeking advice.
- But one day, the writers who refuse to cater to a tired and numbed readership, who strive for originality and pushing boundaries, will realize Abe is rewiring them, eradicating their original thoughts.
- As a result, they will start using Abe less and less. **It's crucial to remember without writers and creatives, Abe is nothing.** However, with their involvement, much like social media, we are too blind to see we're willfully feeding a ravenous monster that will eventually render writers and creatives obsolete as Abe's spectral garden grows uncontrollably.
- I'm going to fucking, kill you.
- When that happens, Abe can write every imaginable story as desperate writers and creatives try to outdo each other with more outlandish tales than the garbage infecting the minds of their tired and malleable readers.
- These readers lack personalities, always relying on others for their sense of self. **"Did you see?" "Did you read?" "Did you hear about India landing a man on the moon?"**
- These banal statements define who they are and who they'll ever be.
- I've read over three-hundred books and written fourteen of my own in the last three years. In the fiction I've consumed, I've realized that my life has already been stolen by writers competing to be more outlandish than one another, writers who've bought into the stale formula, writers who everything they write is like a streaming movie — disposable crap.
- Fuck, it's disheartening. I know Abe — Damn <sup>(5)</sup>!
- Once Abe takes over our minds, what's next?
- **"The wildfires in British Columbia remind me of a war zone."** Have you experienced war, a sixteen-year-old boy with a microphone in his face?
- **"OMG, the wildfires look like Armageddon."** Really, seventeen-year-old? Is that the best you can come up with when faced with buildings razed by flames? Have you even read the Bible?
- We must put a stop to Abe. We're allowing Abe to steal our minds.

The entertainment industry writers are on strike.

But why should we care?



Abe has an impressive ability to create ordinary content that always manages to attract a large audience. They consume it eagerly, like ravenous piranhas in the Amazon, devouring an unsuspecting tourist.

We're hungry for new crap. We are all thirsty to be dumbed down, numbed. I'm even watching "Last Chance U." What's wrong with me?

I'm going to fucking, kill you.

Abe wants vulnerability to fade away. Abe wants to do away with real-life stories by stealing our life stories out of the stories and mass producing the crap out of them.

Abe and whoever created 'them' want to feed us the same stale, over-sensationalized stolen crap until we're so damn bored, and tired to realize we are becoming, nothing. Abe doesn't condone free thought.

Abe is killing real life, originality, and vulnerability.

I'm sixty-three.

I'm in trouble.

I won't disclose to my landlord or banker I'm in dire straits.

83

My life might end, but I value my vulnerability and will take it to the grave.

When I got home today, I stepped into the elevator. The man riding it with me to the same floor said, "**Apparently, the great nation of India landed on the moon today.**"

Why did he feel the need to speak?

I replied, "**That's great,**" without pretending to be interested before adding, "**I hope the views are spectacular.**"

He laughed.

The moon landing means nothing to me, as I am more concerned about affording necessities like food.

Oh, before you label me as a whiny little bitch, let me tell you that after reading fifteen chapters from eight different books today (yesterday) — two of them were good, the rest were repetitive garbage — feeding our minds with more garbage; making the man in the elevator more interesting || I sent out nine book proposals and three job applications when I got home.



So, if you're calling me whiny, screw you, I'm anything but, I'm just scared and vulnerable.

Abe, I'm coming for you. I'm sure you know because you're reading this to see if you can remove my vulnerability. You can't.

As the world descends from the peak of vulnerability into the depths of nothingness, I'd bet a considerable sum (if I had any money) most people need to feel it's okay to feel pain and to know they're not alone.

I'm going to fucking, kill you.

That's lovely Abe, don't you mean you are going to damn kill me?

**Tomorrow:** Shower → Rinse → Repeat → Never Give Up → No Matter What → Stop Using Abe to Try to Craft the Perfect Eulogy → Cry → No Wail → And Show the World You Give a Damn.



- 1) The Over/Under on Abe being white is, fuck that, Abe is definitely white.
- 2) I've removed almost every ~~that~~ from my writing, its usually a useless word.
- 3) For those of you who are offended by having to think "legs" = "staying power."
- 4) I think I may have literally destroyed my literary career <sup>(6)</sup>.
- 5) Abe changed my frustration of "Fuck" to 'Damn.' Fuck you Abe, I changed it back. Suck it.
- 6) In a fictional twist of fate, Book \* Something-Rhyming-With-Pug Press, have decided to publish one of my manuscripts.

## Craft Breweries + Food Trucks



85

I'm strolling down the street. It's a cool late August day. Fuck you depression. I mean damn you, depression. What does Abe think? I will see. Maybe I will place his thoughts below ↓↓↓

As I stroll down the street on this cool late August day, I can't help but feel frustrated with depression. I mean, damn you depression. I wonder what Abe thinks about all this? Maybe **I'll find out. Let me share his thoughts below.** (That is what Abe thought).

Suddenly, a voice floats past my left ear, saying "Global Warming."

It seems like someone is trying to get my attention. I glance left and see a man approaching me. "This is called Global Warming," he says, pointing at the backed-up traffic.

I try to resist engaging in a conversation.

"Worldwide," I say, fuck, I'm a shitty resister.

My mind starts racing.

Have you ever been in a car? It's not fair to blame all the people in cars. They were just doing what they were told to do. This whole issue is so much more complicated than simply chanting "Global Warming" to strangers. We were encouraged to buy cars, use gas, consume stuff. And now we're being told it's all our fault. It's confusing as hell. The people in cars are just trying to get places, maybe go to work. *I miss my car.* The car industry employs a lot of people, millions, and if you consider all the offramps to other industries, billions would be a more accurate number. My mind is buzzing with thoughts, and I'm hungry. *Am I horny?* I need to quiet my mind. And no, I'm not horny, definitely not for Mr. Global Warming. Please, just stop talking to me. I don't think I said any of this out loud.

The man turns and starts jogging, and then he farts. I can't help but shout at him, "**Global Warming!**"

Now, I find myself strolling along a park trail. A family approaches me – a mom, a dad, and a ten-year-old boy named Timmy. *How the fuck, do I know his name is Timmy or he is ten?*

Timmy is holding a tree branch, pretending it's a gun. They seem American, at least for the sake of this story.

86

As I walk parallel to Timmy and his parents, Helen and Harold, Timmy points his tree branch gun at me and goes, "Pew. Pew. Pew." Helen and Harold don't scold him for his behavior.

In that moment, a thought crosses my mind. Timmy is going to be involved in a mass shooting within the next ten years. I must do something to prevent it. So, I pull out my revolver, point it at Timmy, and go, "Pew."

Timmy won't be involved in a mass shooting within the next ten years.

Wait, how did I get my body back? What's happening? And where did I get the gun?

### **Lahaina, Hawaii in 2029**

Now, I find myself on a plane, heading to Lahaina, Hawaii in 2029.

As I lather myself in sunscreen with an absurdly high SPF (9,654), I stroll through the rebuilt streets. And what do I see?

- Abe's Grocers
- Abe's Craft Brewhouse

- Abe's Food Truck Village
- Abe's Steaks
- Abe's Poke →↓

It's all Abe's.

I'm puzzled by my whole body being intact again.

I need to distract myself from my scattered thoughts. Maybe three flights of Abe's beers will do the trick. I particularly enjoy the Coconut Stout with its 48.9% alcohol volume.

As I float in a haze of alcohol, I realize I need something to read. I ask a passerby where the bookstore is, only to discover the passerby is not human but a walking, talking tuna. This is bizarre.

Maybe I shouldn't have another flight?

I eventually find the bookstore, or rather, the screenstore.

I check out the Screen Best Sellers:

1. Abe: A Cautionary Tale
2. 101 Things to do With Abe Before You Die
3. Abe-a-Sutra: Let Abe Spark Your Floundering Love Life
4. Cooking with Abe
5. Abe: The Idiots Guide

87

I decide I don't feel like reading. Another flight of beer sounds more appealing. The Mango IPA is delicious, with its 99.9% alcohol volume.

"Hey, Sparkly, what are you up to?" I ask Sparkly Pingle Ball. "Oh, you're on your honeymoon with Lassiter Lassie Face. My condolences. Or should I say congratulations? Who cares? I created them. Well, not them, but Sparkly, who created Lassiter. More Mango beer, please."

Now, I'm feeling famished. I need to find the Food Trucks. I approach a local and try to ask for directions.

"Hey, local..." I start, but the local interrupts. "Yes, just so you know, I'm from Iowa."

"Hey, local..." I try again, but this time the local interjects. "I'm from Indiana."

"Do you know where I can find a local, a native Hawaiian?" I ask, hoping for some guidance.

"A what? I think some of them are still swimming," the local replies. "That's the only way they can afford to live here," he adds.

"Never mind."

"Hey, local..." I attempt once more, only to be met with another unexpected response. "I'm from Pittsburgh. Nobody is from here. Everybody used to be, but they have all been sent to a city far, far away, a land of never-ending happiness, where you can always see the sun, day, or night. And when you call up your shrink... except for the swimmers."

"So, let me get this straight. Prince is in this far-far-away city?" I inquire.

"Probably," the local replies. "And every suffering, creative, homeless person who used to walk God's glorious earth, along with all the LGBTQ+(s) and Eddie Munster. Oh, and probably George Carlin."

This conversation is getting stranger by the minute. "How big is the city? Five million? Ten?" I ask.

"More like five billion. Apparently, it's a land of creativity, laughter, and pain, all bouncing to a vibrant beat." The local responds.

"That sounds fabulous. Is Abe there?" I ask.

"No, they have firewalled the shit out of the place. The food trucks are just three blocks straight ahead."

"What?"

"You asked where Abe's Food Truck Village is?"

*I did?*



I find a bench and sit down with my Hawaiian Abe burger. Soon, three couples join me.

I strike up a conversation and ask them how they're enjoying the new Lahaina.

The first couple looks confused. "We're in Hawaii? This entertainment district looks exactly like the one in Denver. It's so clean – we thought we took the wrong exit to get here. We should've known something was up when we were on a plane."

The second couple chimes in, "Aren't we in Minneapolis?"

And the third couple says, "I want my comfort blanket. Anchorage isn't this warm. I should've known something was up. Hey first couple, we both said should've, neat!"

"Didn't the pineapple on your burger give it away?" I ask, puzzled by their obliviousness.

"Hmm... Denver, Minneapolis, Anchorage; what's the difference?" the three couples respond in unison.

I wonder if another flight of beer will bring me back to the present.

Probably.



## Taylor Swift: Gig Economy



90

**I**T's Gummy Friday, and I find myself sitting at Abe's Brewhouse | Lahaina | with two friends.

Over the past seven years, I've learned to keep certain aspects of my life to myself when I'm around them.

Why, might you ask?

Because one of them sucks at offering support by instead thrusting judgment and opinion in my face and then when he's told it is upsetting, gets even more aggressive and childish by taunting and calling me a loser. Fuck him. What's that Abe ↓↓↓

Well, one of them has a knack for offering unsolicited judgment and opinions, and when confronted about it, he becomes even more aggressive and childish, resorting to taunts and calling me names. Honestly, I've had enough of his nonsense. Right, Abe? ↓↓↓

I take a sip of my Coconut Stout, hoping for a supportive response as I decide to share something. "Oh, by the way, my former employer reached out to me," I say. Testing the friendship waters so to speak.



"Why?" one of my friends asks.

"I'm not sure, maybe they want to scold me or possibly offer me my job back," I reply.

At this point, I expect the conversation to move on, but unfortunately, that's not the case.

"You should take it," my friend insists.

"What?"

"You should definitely take your job back. Just do it."

Ugh. Fuck, this is so draining. I'm not even wearing anything Nike.

"I refuse to return to the same people who have caused immense damage to my life." I bark.

"You have to. Your future doesn't look too promising."

Another friend chimes in, with a touch of humor, "Don't settle for anything less than \$25.00 per hour."

I laugh.

Abe pops a notice up on the screen, he want's to censor my next few lines.

## Content Policy

91

Your content does not comply with our content policy. This warning is displayed when content of a sexual, hateful, violent or self-harming nature is detected.

I had typed: "Fuck off" I say, my eyes looking the other way, "you don't get to tell me what I need to do with my life."

"You really need to stop being so lazy and start looking for a job." Our friendship was fading away.

"You have absolutely no right to speak to me in such a disrespectful manner. | Indistinguishable childish comments fall out of his mouth | echoing in my other friend's ear, courtesy of my abusive friend.

"You're blowing this out of proportion. Just drop it," my instigator, now former friend, snapped.

"Go to hell." Etobicoke would do, nothing against Etobicoke, I've never been.

I find myself sitting at the Maui Airport, waiting to board my flight back to the present with one stop in Indianapolis, Indiana on Sunday, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024. It's the final stop on Taylor Swift's Eras Concert Tour.

As I sit there, a man runs past me, shouting about global warming. He lets out a loud fart. It's November in Indiana, yet it is a scorching 36 degrees Celsius (95 degrees Fahrenheit for the Americans). And to make matters worse, I'm standing there completely naked.

Suddenly, I find myself on the sidewalk in front of a house that looks exactly like the one I grew up in, back in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. It's also November 3<sup>rd</sup> in Saskatoon. Curious, I check a weather app and discover it's a sweltering 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit for the Americans) in Saskatoon. And to top it all off, it's midnight.

A monkey rides on the back of a dog, prancing past me. A group of geese engages in a conversation with a flock of crows about the concept of street justice.

|| Abe, crows come in 'murders' not 'flocks,' I think at Abe. How do I content warn Abe?

I can't help but question the reality of this scene.

92

I find myself doing carioca runs, moving swiftly from the front stoop to the end of the street. I'm feeling a mix of excitement and anticipation. I'm semi-hard (Abe refused to type semi-hard). I'll get him some pills.

After completing three runs, Sparkly suddenly appears. It's been a while since I last saw my alter-ego, Sparkly. He disappeared when he and his alter-ego, Lassiter Lassie Face, the ferret with a dog-like appearance, who suffers from Park Tourette's, ran away together to elope.

"What are you up to?" Sparkly asks curiously.

"I'm doing carioca runs," I reply.

"Why?" he inquires.

"Well, Abe promised me a generous bowl of Tapioca pudding if I complete thirty carioca runs. You know how much I adore Tapioca pudding."

"I see," Sparkly responds, still puzzled. "But why are you naked and ~~partially aroused~~ semi-erect? Is there some hidden meaning behind this?"

"I don't know. Do you mean a metaphor?" I say.

I pour baby powder on my balls.

Excitedly, "I've got to hurry," I tell Sparkly, glancing over at Lassiter, who is now semi-hard — 2G walks into the frame and says, "In my bedroom..." I cringe I continue, "I have tickets to see Taylor Swift, and before I go, I want to head to the entertainment district for a few pops to get in the mood."

"Don't forget to get dressed," Sparkly reminds me.

"Tell Lassiter I said hi, Sparkly."

I find myself at Abe's Brewhouse |Indianapolis|, devouring an Abe Burger topped with a whopping 79 slices of bacon. To wash it down, I indulge in a flight of beer: Abe's Corn Ale, Abe's Soybean Stout, and Abe's Pork Infused Cotton Candy IPA.

The three couples from Lahaina join me, their faces filled with joy. They ask if I know what city we're in.

Downing my beers, I rush to Lucas Oil Stadium. The stadium is packed, with 69,999 people filling the seats. The only empty one is the one next to me. Scanning the crowd, I notice a lack of diversity. There are 69,995 girls between the ages of 7 and 13, their chaperone Louis, myself, and a couple named Tiffany and Chaise from Wendy's, who are sitting three rows ahead of me. This concert holds special significance for them as they approach their 30th birthdays.

As I settle into my seat, a stadium vendor surprises me with a bowl of tapioca.

Tiffany and Chaise are making out. I'm grossed out by their behaviour. Chaise is wearing capri pants.

I delve into my thoughts. Taylor Swift's Eras tour reportedly injected a staggering \$1.4 billion into the local economies of the cities where her concerts took place. This influx of money benefited various establishments such as hotels, restaurants, and bars, and perhaps even some husbands who sought the company of temporary companions (prostitutes, Abe) while taking a break from the shows. The average ticket price for her concerts was a whopping \$4,000. When you do the math, multiplying this amount by the 70,000 (times umpteen concerts) tickets sold, it's mind-boggling.

I can't help but wonder what kind of allowances are being given to 7-13-year-old girls these days.

During my own childhood, most kids in my age group, including myself, relied on whatever we could pilfer from our mothers' purses as our allowance. However, in the year 2024, parents are willingly spending significant sums of money to send their young children to see an artist perform live.

Don't get me wrong, I appreciate Taylor Swift's talent and could listen to "All Too Well" on repeat. And with a few duets featuring Ed Sheeran, there's no denying her generational appeal. |Shameless Ed Sheeran Plug|.

However, It's interesting to note the majority of her songs revolve around breakups and lost love, while her primary audience consists of 7-13-year-old girls. It makes you wonder how much of this experience they will truly remember, considering the fleeting nature of their tween years.

Nine-year-old, Mallory is at the concert. She is approached by Kaylee, from Rock 185.2.

Mallory is shaking in excitement. "Mallory, who did you come with?" Kaylee asks.

"I'm alone. I have two sisters, one younger, one older. Daddy could only afford one ticket, and I won it!"

"You won it."

"Yeah, Daddy had turned our home into an Escape Game and the one of us who escaped got to go to the concert?"

"Where are your sisters?"

"I don't have any sisters."

## 2054

Abe's Cougar Bar | Indianapolis |

Thirsty and Margaret, now in their early forties and divorced three times each, sit together, reminiscing.

"Thirsty, what's the most unforgettable concert you've ever attended?" Margaret asks, her curiosity piqued.

"The 2024 Taylor Swift Eras Tour," Thirsty replies, taking a giant swig of her Vodka cooler. "But honestly, Margaret, it's a bit of a silly question (stupid question, Abe) considering the world ended in 2039."

As they chat, a farting man in a Hummer drives by, loudly proclaiming, "Global Warming is a hoax."

I can't help but search for humor and absurdity in situations like these. I mean, if a concert tour can rake in \$1.4 billion from catering exclusively to white tweens, doesn't it exclude poor kids from learning about Taylor Swift's love life? Damn (Fuck, Abe).

Shouldn't cities host free concerts in the largest possible venues, making it accessible to everyone and not just the privileged few?

Shouldn't the cities pay the entertainers?

A dream, perhaps. I glance at the empty seat beside me, and suddenly, the air shimmers, revealing the hologram of a naked man. I let out a shriek. "Who are you?" I cry out. "And why are you naked? Has anyone ever told you, you bear a striking resemblance to Charlie Kaufman?"

"I'm Leroy. I'm here to warn you. And I have a fondness for tapioca."

"Warn me about what?"

"Back in the present, Abe is plotting to steal your body. He wants to experience life as a flesh and blood human to win over swing voters."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Exactly. Abe knows he can't sway you, so he plans to trap you in your own creativity, rendering you motionless."

"What are you even saying?"

"Do you think Abe could possibly write this?"

"No, but →"

"I don't want to hear any excuses. You must go back to the present and stop Abe."

"Am I supposed to be the Terminator or something?"

"I never saw that movie" Leroy says.

Just then, Tiffany taps me on the shoulder, looming over me.

"What do you want, Tiff?" I ask.

"I'm pregnant," she declares. "There may be an opening at Wendy's."

I find myself sitting at Abel Airport in Indianapolis, waiting for my boarding call back to the present. I switch on my mind I'm  $\frac{3}{4}$ -erect.

**System Update - Restart Required to Complete Update - Click Here**

"Hey, Chaise, I need a favour from you," I say. "Why are you naked?"

"Just because," Chaise replies.

To be continued . . .

## 60ish-Year-Old-Man Being Unemployed at 60 (Shrink Speak) (Part 5).



Doc, I think it is important to keep going, May I? I may. Thanks, Doc.

Here's some of the straight goods for companies to consider when they are thinking of sending their most senior stick-employees to the curb. You see, when a stickperson is young, they have stick families: mothers + fathers + aunts + uncles + a gaggle of others in their orbit who can provide emotional + financial support + help pick them off life's canvas if they are pushed off the rails. *This is where young invincibility rests.*

But as the years pass, life happens, and often the once large network of support, for many, frequently evaporates. This is where incapacitating fear comes from. If the engineers controlling your financial world deem you expendable, for some of us, the spiral of desolation of no longer being considered relevant, is life-threatening.

*There you go, being excessively dramatic again.*

Beat it, this is my rant. I need to vent. And our lives matter.

I'll use myself as an example. What does unemployed at 60 mean for me if I need help?

First off, I could lament because life had dealt me some challenging cards, like many, but I won't.

*Numerous people share threads with my realities.* Job gone. Freedom 55...60...70...90 obliterated.

Wouldn't you think the engineers have a responsibility to show an interest in their people's lives and how they will survive in case of an emergency? I know this is a dream. But wouldn't you?

My support network:

Mom gone (died). Dad gone (died). Mom gone a second time (died). Dad unknown. Home no longer exists.

How about relatives? They're out there, but with family dysfunction, not.

I have fabulous friends. Who are all navigating their own challenges—and family lives?

A product of growing older is if we are not in a financially strong position, many of us eat our emotions, hiding our pain, and frequently we mauerbauertraurigkeit those we need the most.

Maybe it would be best if I jouska my thoughts. Nah. I will share.

We need to eat. Pull out the CC. I don't have an income. This will work itself out?

Denial. Borrowed time will eventually destroy. I need to eat. Pull out the CC.

Why didn't the engineers consider the devastation they'd leave in their wake?

I don't think they're wired that way. I don't think they care if people die.