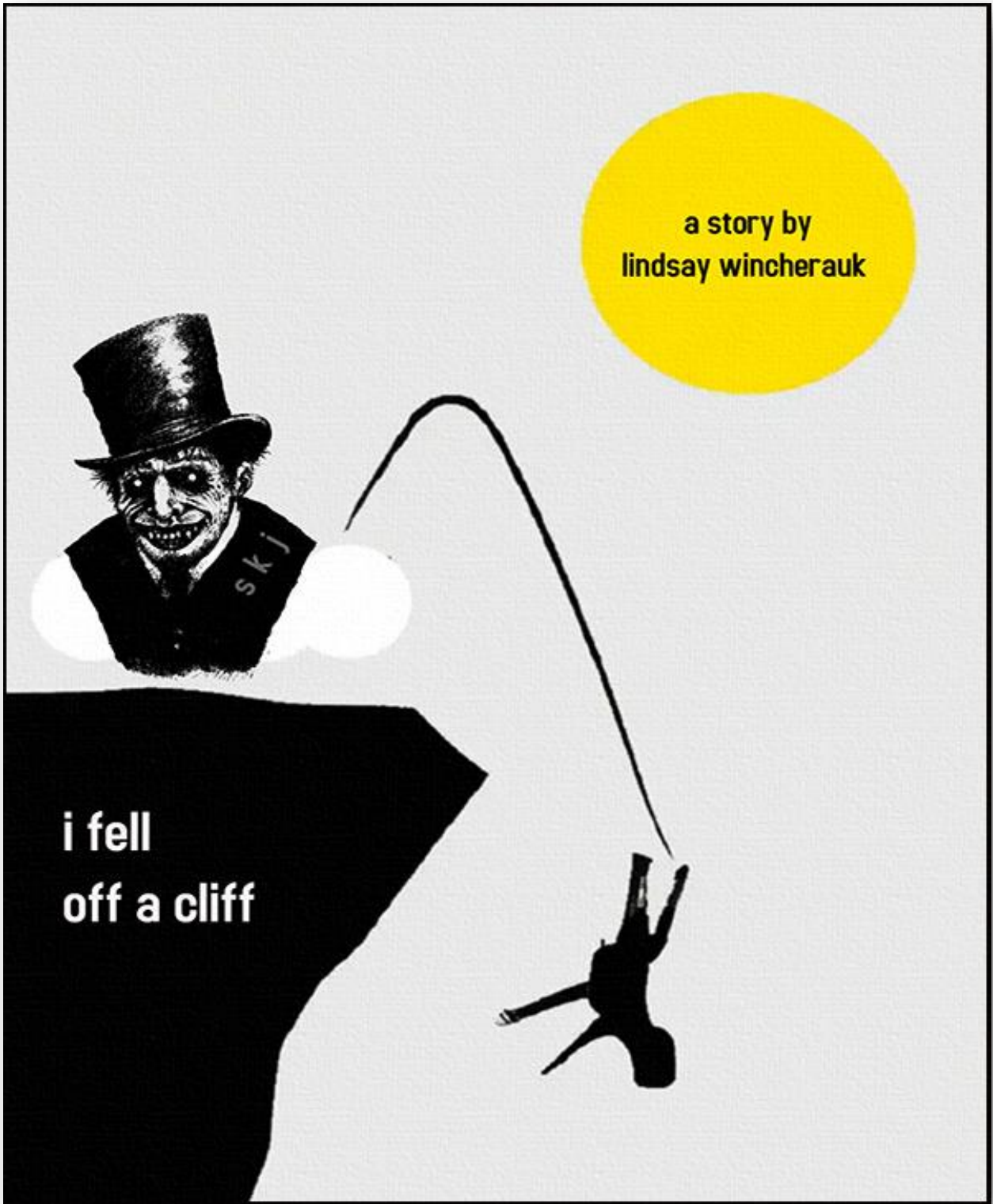


I FELL OFF A CLIFF



LINDSAY WINCHERAUK

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I don't want to become homeless.

... ..

DISCLAIMER

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, business, events, and incidents are products of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

... ..

I's just after 6 AM, and I'm working on my future in front of my computer. The morning news is playing on the corner of the screen; keeping me company. The company sometimes is devastating. A story comes on about budgeting.

Another one is about investing.

Another one is about inflation.

Another is about the homeless count being restarted; the person reporting this seems happy.

And then another story comes on about...

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Why did I pause?

These stories are fuelling my depression.

Why?

They are no longer for me.

Why?

Because I'm 62.5 years old. And I lost my career at the start of the pandemic.

I FELL OFF A CLIFF

Why?

I'm not permitted to talk about it... monsters are lurking, monitoring my every keystroke.

But this is a work of fiction.

It doesn't matter; they're monsters.

I fell off a cliff today.

What?

A literal one. I'm battling with depression and uncertainty.

7AM

I updated my website and cranked out 6 book proposals upping my total of submissions sent out to 644, with 543 of them still being alive – or at least not rejected yet.

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A man (a friend of the monsters) once called me a 'failed writer' who has no business chasing my 'dreams.'

I'm 62.5 years old; if I don't chase now, then when?

I keep chasing. Fuck him. Fuck them. I keep sending out proposals.

What if he's right?

If he's right.

This is the artist's life.
Believe. Believe. Believe
Then die.

I'm in the believing stage.

I must believe.

I'm 62.5 years old.

Are you any good as a writer or creator?

Yes. I believe.

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I Google myself. Many authors and publishers are using my words on their websites to promote their authors.

And I'm mentioned in an author's interview with the Winnipeg Free Press. Wow!

And many authors and publishers have thanked me for my thoughtful words.

And publishers continually ask me to read their books and share my thoughts.

And...

That's a lot of ands.

One more: (AND) I am (see pitch numbers above) pitching 18 manuscripts.

There are no guarantees you know.

There is one guarantee: If I don't try, I die without believing.

I keep trying.

3

I work incredibly hard at my craft; *I want you*; by you, I mean; many people to read my words and thoughts.

I'm a kind man.

A compassionate man.

An empathetic man.

A man being washed over by relentless waves of depression.

Why?

Because I wasn't ready to call it a day on my work career.

Because I'm scared.

Because I'm broke.

Because...

Try.

I trick myself.

I've gone to the fitness asylum for the first 11 days in 2023. I'm challenging myself to be in the best shape of my life in 2023. **The goal:** 100 workouts in the first 100 days of the year. I have a cardiologist appointment in June, and I'm training for it.

**I used to train for sports.
Now I'm training to fool my heart doctor and to keep living.**



I've gone to the fitness asylum for 11 days in a row.

Stop walking backwards on the treadmill.

Stop singing with your earbuds in.

Stop banging your water bottle into the bottle holder every few seconds.

Get off your fucking phone.

Why?

Because I'm trying to listen to the conversation of the wonderful friends (of each other) on the stair machines behind me. The lady of the two, her husband, is dying. Their conversation is my distraction.

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I've gone to the asylum for 11 days in a row.

I've walked over 25,000 steps every day this year.

I'm depressed.

You don't act depressed.

I'm an excellent actor.

I walk.

Time for lunch.

I eat crap.

Why do you do that?

Because it's cheaper.

I still can't afford it.

I feel guilty every time I eat.

I won't eat tomorrow.

I read.

I FELL OFF A CLIFF

I've read my first three books in 2023, and I read 72 last year, and publishers sent most of them to me.

But you're a failed writer.

Am I?

I never quit trying.

I read.

I read.

I read.

I write.

I write.

I write.

With every word I read, I realize how little I know.

I write.

5 **But you're not permitted to write** – the monsters want to shut you down. The monsters don't want you to thrive. They want you to stop believing. They want you to die.

I finish my sodium-enriched lunch I can't afford. I understand I'm in financial turmoil.

I register for the Art Council of British Columbia Grant Program.

There are no guarantees.

The financial turmoil gap needs to be bridged by me. I am searching for temporary employment. I find some I'd be capable of doing. I smile. A frown replaced the smile because I realized these positions weren't for me.

What?

I worked fifteen years in Human Resources before I was replaced, **and if I learnt one thing from those years, it's this:** 62.5-year-olds are not much in demand.

I feel old, I'm fucking scared.

I will apply for something to bridge the gap. I've already sent out many applications, all with the same result: **NO RESPONSE.**

I FELL OFF A CLIFF

I send out more proposals.

I want to cry.

I keep trying.

I walk. I must make it over 30,000 steps today. I walk. Walk. Walk.

My head is clear. I come to a fitness facility downtown. They have an extensive nutritious beverage list. All beverages are \$10. I'm 62.5 years old, and I can't afford to consume nutrition.

This doesn't hit me yet.

I keep walking.

I feel good, at least okay; I keep moving.

What are you going to do?

Keep moving. I know no better.

I move.

I stop to meet friends for a moment, for a pop. I can't afford it. But, of course, that doesn't hit me yet.

I need interaction for my sanity.

A woman sits next to me. She's escaped a nearby hospital.

She's draped in her hospital blanket.

She smells bad.

She's sad and lonely.

I judge her.

I retract my judgment.

She's sad and lonely.

I tell stories. The greatest gift you can give someone is giving them stories they can tell.

I walk home with a friend. I've walked this route thousands of times over the last twenty years. Twenty years ago, it was different; there seemed to be a sense of wonderment donning the faces of the other pedestrians. Now, there appears to be desperation and fear. I don't want to look. I don't want to be correct.

They are doing a homeless count again.

I FELL OFF A CLIFF

I'll save them the trouble.

Lots.

Too many.

More every day.

I have one thing I need to do on the way home: buy dishwasher detergent, which I can't afford.

Doing the dishes will become easier soon when I can no longer afford food.

A wave of depression washes over me. I'm 62.5 years old, and I can't afford to eat, *but yay*, I'm a failed writer who is respected and has graced the pages of the Winnipeg Free Press.

I make it home.

I got to pee.

I rush to the bathroom.

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I STEP UP TO THE EDGE OF THE CLIFF

I started relieving myself. I look down. I forgot to lift the toilet lid. I'm 62.5 years old.

I START FALLING

I lift the lid and finish relieving myself.

I zip up my pants.

I wasn't done. I feel a trickle of warmth rushes down my leg.

I CRY AND CRASH INTO DESPAIR

I'm a 62.5-year-old failed writer who works incredibly hard and never quits trying, but I am running out of time if I don't bridge my financial turmoil. Not months... days. I peed myself. How can I possibly bridge the gap?

I TAKE A SHOWER

When I get out, I glance in the mirror. My sodium diet has expanded my bloat. I don't like the image looking back at me.

I FELL OFF A CLIFF

What's the point of trying?

What's the point of training for my cardiologist?

What's the point of...?

I SLAM INTO SILENCE

I'm scared.

I'm running out of time.

I'm not allowed to say I was fired. Monsters are lurking, and monsters want me gone.

I'm sad.

I can't find my words.

I'm swaddled in the sense of emptiness.

I must snap out of whatever-the-fuck-this-is?

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What is this?

I'm 62.5 years old and don't know what I'm supposed to do...

So...?

I'll keep trying. I'll get up tomorrow and write, read, go to the fitness asylum, walk, read, write... and never fucking give up.

I need the monsters to give me my freedom.

What hurts the most about their choices?

The speed of letting me go.

I get up.

I move.

I try.

I'm not a failed... anything.

