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1ikeness

magazine

a new beginning

Foreword

Low Entropy is headquartered in Kwikwetlem First Nation Territory of the Coast Salish people, and in the shared territory of the səl̓ilwətaʔɬ təməxʷ, xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Stz'uminus, Qayqayt and S'ólh Téméxw nations.

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About Low Entropy: Founded in 2015, the Low Entropy Foundation is home to free programs and events that focus on personal and community growth through empowerment, authenticity and meaningful interpersonal connections.

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It happens, on occasion, in retrospect. Time flows forward, but our perspectives shift swiftly, imperceptibly (yet, somehow it feels abruptly), creating angles and meanders. The fresh push forward is a natural subsequent starting point, but the turn . . . that was worth at least a memory too, surely?

The segmentation of life is not necessary, but it is orderly and facilitates heart-to-hearts and a good chortle around some pints. It's useful, this way of thinking, this shaping of thought itself. Maybe it's coping.

Likeness is coming to an end, for now. I've loved all the turns and not-turns, and I hope you got something out of our little project too. In its absence will be a bit of silence, breath and heart-beat, potential for new beginnings. I am excited, though for I know not what.

But. I get ahead of myself. We still have this one last dawdle. Maybe one or all of the stops and starts and eye-openers within will inspire anew. Or maybe it's just a quaint read with some tea, maybe, or whatever.

Whatever it is. I wouldn't miss it for the world. I'm lucky I didn't.

Thank you for being here.

Simon Cheung

Editor, Low Entropy

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Photo by Cassie Lopez

**GUR-
LEEN
KAUR
BAJWA**

Both a prolific reader and writer, Gurleen likes living inside exciting stories. She's working on making her own the most exciting of all.

Love in Reverse

Gurleen Kaur Bajwa

“ I do.”

The whistling and clapping started an uproar as James reached forward and kissed Angie sweetly and lightly with the briefest of kisses. She laughed and blushed slightly as the photograph snapped away the picture of her and her newly-wed husband arm-in-arm in happiness.

It was a beautiful day for an outing, as each and every one of their guests had to admit, some of her already-married friends looking on enviously, recalling their comparably awful wedding days.

The photos were taken at the edge of the cliff overlooking Saltan Bay, which was a good 50-foot drop below.

The first few photographs were just the bride and groom looking into each other's eyes with smiles, and then, there were the uncomfortable and tight family photos, which took a long time to process due to all the confusion and exasperation.

There was one particular photo however, which would cause Angie pause, five years later, when she would find an old box of her wedding day memories stowed under the stairs as they prepared to move.

There was her and James, looking very much in love and at each other. But to her right, a little blurred and out of focus, she would see another man, the best man, holding a glass of champagne in his hand, his suit pressed as neatly as she'd yelled at him to make it the night before, and the expression on his face could only be described as a bittersweet smile. One of happiness, yet sadness as he looked upon the bride.

She would be confused, but forget it soon enough, because Aaron had moved away to the states a few years ago, but called her almost every weekend, and visited every year from Christmas to New Year's. He brought her daughter iPads and dresses, and the little girl called him Uncle Ron.

So, she would forget.

“Aaron!”

He finally opened the door, after Angie had rung four times, impatiently clapping her hands together in the cold outside his apartment.

He stood there, in a disheveled shirt and wrinkled sweat pants, yawning and rubbing his eyes, looking at her blearily.

"Angie? It is . . ." He looked at his watch and groaned, rubbing his eyes. "Three in the morning."

"I have big news!"

Without looking at his tired expression and ignoring his halfhearted protest that he had work tomorrow, Angie rushed past him and into his living room, pacing it excitedly, wringing her hands in nervous apprehension.

"What Angie, what, what." He followed her and stood across from her, looking exhausted, bags under his eyes, scratching at his hair in a bleary voice, half asleep.

"Aaron." She pursed her lips together, unable to hide the wide grin forming. "Aaron, James asked me to marry him!"

Immediately his expression went rigid with shock, and then a slow grin formed on his face.

"James, that bastard. Angie, what did you say?"

"Yes!"

She squealed and jumped into his outstretched arms as he laughed out loud, hugging her to him, giving a little twirl. He then pulled away to hold her at arm's length.

"Should I be suspicious as to what you two were doing at three in the morning?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"No." He pulled her in for a hug again, wrapping his arms so tight that there was nothing between them.

Aaron jumped slightly as Angie slammed down the coffee, making everything else on the table at their favorite corner shop rattle.

He gave her a nervous look, knowing only too well today was not going to be a good day.

"I freakin' hate him," she said loudly, giving an angry glare to her phone screen before also slamming that down.

"James again?" Aaron tried to slow down his breathing.

"Yes, who else?" she said sarcastically, taking a furious gulp too fast, and choked.

Aaron handed her a napkin in slight apprehension and she snatched it and wiped at her shirt furiously before dropping it.

"Aaron." She slammed her fist down, and Aaron took a minute to check that his heart hadn't stopped beating.

"You're a guy."

"I think so?"

"So tell me, how hard is it to remember your three-year anniversary?"

"Uhhh, it's . . . it's, well—"

"And." Fist slam again. "On top of that, sending a message, a freakin' message . . . oh, I'm going out of town for a surfing trip with the guys, ON SAID ANNIVERSARY. Guys that you just saw at graduation like two months ago!"

"I'm sorry!"

"You should be!"

She slumped back into her chair with a huff, her brow crossed.

Aaron pushed his own coffee toward her gently, as hers was now more on the floor than her stomach.

"Did you see Professor Thompson about that research position?" he suggested tentatively.

"Don't change the topic."

She took a deep gulp out of the cup, then exhaled, putting it down.

"She said she'd sent in a request, but that I was second after Christina for preference, can you believe that? That girl didn't even get into grad school the first time."

Aaron listened without looking away a single moment, agreeing with everything she said, and whole-

heartedly nodding his head to her furious comments. He never looked away once as they sat next to the window sill of a corner shop that neither of them remembered anymore.

Angie felt they had never had a funner date.

After watching *Off the Shore*, they had missed their reservation at the new French cuisine James had wanted to try. That might have seemed as though it would ruin their perfect night, but now it seemed like fate.

They spent two hours on the grassy lawn outside the theatre, fast food and sports drinks littered in front of them, laughing until their stomachs started to hurt, watching the stars.

They walked aimlessly through the city, hand in hand, enjoying watching rather than participating in the night life passing by.

Another hour flashed by in the arcade, where Angie felt no shame in acting like a child, whining over half-points and arguing over the most embarrassingly meaningless things.

They held hands outside the mall entrance again, as James sneaked a kiss, before the long horn from Angie's ride home interrupted their bliss.

James waved cutely as she got into the car and she waved back, continuing to do so until she couldn't see him anymore.

Aaron mumbled something about "We have a lab tomorrow" and "It's only been four months" as Angie excitedly started telling him about her night with James, who'd suddenly somehow, in the course of one night, gone from a boyfriend to a prospective forever.

Aaron listened in silence, only inputting his opinion every so often on how Angie shouldn't get too attached, cause the guy seemed like a dick.

Second year of university took Angie by storm.

While Aaron somehow managed to keep his workload to a bare three-coffee minimum, Angie found herself plowing through pages after pages of work late at night, going through six cups of coffee sometimes, falling asleep only to rush in the morning and pull pants over her head.

With Aaron's suggestion, she decided that enough was enough and it was time to try his study group. The first day she arrived, she almost went straight back home.

It was a table full of what looked like a bunch of boys picked from a reality TV show about how to have no life. But she recalled the mountain of work waiting to swallow her back in her dorm, and decided to be brave.



Taking a seat beside Aaron, who gave her a half-encouraging thumbs up and pat on the back, she opened up her book with a heavy sigh. That was when she accidentally met the gaze of the guy sitting across from her.

He was looking at her intently, actually with a bit too much intensity, as she noticed after a slight pause. It was enough to make her squirm uncomfortably and for Aaron to clear his throat loudly.

Trying to clear the awkward silence that had fallen, Angie reached her hand across the table.

"I'm Angie." She smiled briefly.

He took her hand and met her eyes again.

"James."

"I can't believe I got fired," Aaron groaned, and dumped his bag on the living room sofa, collapsing onto the ground as Angie offered him some of the chips on the table.

"You were going to. You sleep on the job."

"I do not. That was one time."

"Anything else to eat, sweetheart?" Angie's mother poked her head from the kitchen to warmly look at Aaron, who shook his head.

"No thanks Mrs. H."

"Mom, we have to work on the school project." Angie said, shooing her with a hand.

"Question," Aaron raised a finger. "Is it possible to flunk grade 10 by sleeping through it?"

"Only if you're you."

"What if I don't graduate?" Aaron said in mock horror. "Will you stay behind with me?"

"Hell no," she gave him a playful shove before opening her bag. "Let's get started and look into a new job will you."

It was the first day of spring.

The peach blossoms were falling softly onto the paved sidewalks, and Angie slowly reached out to catch them in her palm. Hardly 50 inches tall, she reached on her toes with her palms outstretched in an effort to grab the fluttering flowers. Unable to do so, she sat down on the edge of the sidewalk with an upset expression, her blue dress fluttering around her knees as she looked out onto the street.

A pink flower suddenly came into view, and she followed the flower up the arm that was offering it to her, to a boy around the same age as her. He held it out to her with an emotionless façade, a bag slung on his bag, as he had obviously been walking home.

She hesitated a moment before taking it from him and smiled sweetly. The tree continued to shower them in the beautiful colors as they stood like that, forever frozen as a midday spring memory, long forgotten with the gusting wind.

PRA-
TEEK
SUR

My name is Prateek Sur and I am a daydreamer by birth, a mechanical engineer by chance, and an idiot by choice. A hardcore movie buff, working as a film critic and enjoying life as a Bollywood reporter, helping people get through career troubles and giving advice from personal experiences. A voracious reader and a passionate singer at heart. An extrovert at heart, and an introvert in the mind. Well, that chaos is pretty much me!

The Sound of the Opponent's Breath

Prateek Sur

Elara used to love the *thwack*. That crisp, satisfying sound of a perfectly struck tennis ball, the vibration humming up her arm, a symphony of power and precision. It was the sound of control, of mastery, of pure, unadulterated joy. Now, all she heard was breath. Not her own, steady and controlled, but her opponent's. The ragged gasp after a long rally, the sharp intake before a serve, the almost imperceptible hitch that betrayed a moment of doubt.

It started subtly, a distraction she could usually bat away with a mental flick of the wrist. But over the past year, as the pressure mounted and the wins felt less like triumphs and more like obligations, the sounds intensified. The *thwack* faded, replaced by the visceral, almost predatory focus on the human on the other side of the net. She'd stopped playing the ball; she was playing the person.

Her coach, Mark, a man whose patience was as legendary as his forehand, noticed the shift.

"Elara, you're overthinking it," he'd say, watching her during practice. "Just hit the ball. Feel the shot."

But Elara couldn't. Her mind was a battlefield of perceived weaknesses. The slight tremor in a rival's hand before a second serve, the way another's eyes darted to their coach after a missed overhead, the almost-imperceptible slump of shoulders when a point



was lost. These were her new targets, more potent than any open court.

She was winning, more than ever before. Her ranking climbed steadily. But each victory felt hollow, a strategic dismantling rather than a joyful conquest. The post-match interviews were a blur of rehearsed platitudes. "I stuck to my game plan." "I capitalized on opportunities." Never, "I loved every minute of it." Because she didn't. The game had become a cold, calculated exercise in psychological warfare, and she was a master tactician, but a miserable one.

The turning point, or perhaps the breaking point, came during the semi-finals of a minor circuit tournament. Her opponent was a young, fiery newcomer named Anya, all raw power and unbridled

Photo by
Moises
Alex

enthusiasm. Anya played with a smile, even when losing points. Elara, however, was dissecting her. She noted the way Anya's breath hitched slightly on her backhand, the almost-imperceptible flinch when Elara hit a deep slice. Elara exploited it, relentlessly.

She won the first set 6-1, a clinical, brutal display.

But in the second set, something shifted. Anya, despite being outplayed, never stopped smiling. Her breathing remained strong, rhythmic, even when exhausted. Elara found herself listening, waiting for the tell, the crack in the facade. It never came. Instead, Anya started hitting impossible winners, retrieving balls Elara thought were long gone. Elara's focus, usually her greatest weapon, began to waver. She was so intent on hearing Anya's weaknesses that she missed the strength, the sheer, unadulterated joy Anya found in simply playing.

Elara lost the second set 4-6. In the third, she was rattled. Her own breath became ragged, her movements stiff. She could hear Anya's steady, powerful exhales with every stroke, a rhythmic counterpoint to Elara's growing panic. Anya wasn't just hitting the ball; she was breathing life into the game. Elara, on the other hand, felt like she was suffocating. Anya won the match, a hard-fought 6-3 in the decider. Elara walked off the court, not with anger, but with a profound sense of emptiness.

That night, she couldn't sleep. The sounds of Anya's breathing echoed in her ears, not as a taunt, but as a revelation. She had been so busy listening for weakness that she had forgotten to listen for the game itself. She had traded the joy of the thwack for the dread of the gasp. The next morning, she called Mark.

"I need a break," she said, her voice surprisingly steady. "A real break. From everything."

Mark, to his credit, didn't argue.

"I thought you might," he said gently. "What are you going to do?"

"I don't know," Elara admitted. "Maybe . . . maybe I'll just hit some balls. Against a wall. With no one watching. No one to listen to."

She started small. An old, cracked public court, far from the pristine, pressure-cooker environments of the circuit. She bought a cheap, brightly colored racket, something entirely unlike her sleek, professional gear. And she hit. Just hit. No score, no opponent, no strategy. Just the ball, the racket, and the wall.

At first, it was awkward. Her body remembered the competitive instincts, the urge to place, to dominate. But slowly, as the days turned into weeks, something began to return. The thwack. It wasn't the same as before, not yet. It was softer, less aggressive, more exploratory. She started experimenting with different spins, different angles, not to win a point, but just to see what the ball would do. She wasn't listening for weaknesses anymore; she was listening for the pure, simple sound of the game.

One afternoon, a young girl, no older than 10, approached the fence, watching Elara with wide, curious eyes. Elara, usually guarded, found herself smiling.

"Want to hit some?" she asked, gesturing to a spare racket.

The girl's face lit up. They played for an hour, laughing at missed shots, celebrating lucky ones. The girl's breath was quick, excited, full of the pure, unadulterated joy Elara had forgotten. And as Elara watched her, she realized something profound. The game wasn't about silencing her opponent's breath; it was about sharing the court,

sharing the joy,

sharing the very air they breathed.

She didn't know if she'd ever return to professional tennis. Maybe she would, maybe she wouldn't. But for the first time in a long time, the thought didn't fill her with dread. It filled her with a quiet hope. She had found her way back to the thwack, not by ignoring the breath, but by understanding that sometimes, the most important sound on the court was the one that reminded you why you started playing in the first place.

"I was lucky to be spared a patronising speech about how much I was 'valued'."

Ending with a Muted Whisper Instead of a Bang

Sue Eldridge-Turi

It was a bright day 33 years ago, when a colleague handed me a piece of paper torn from an exercise book. I was standing by the cash desk in a health food store where I was employed at the time. I had been hired as an associate, but eventually took on most tasks as the manager was seldom there.

I could neither identify the note's author nor their scribblings.

I had just returned from delivering groceries to Marjorie, who lived on the 10th floor of a high-rise at the corner of Yonge Street and St Clair West, a few blocks over. This was my first time delivering groceries to Marjorie, as nobody else wanted to do it. She was rumoured to be a grumpy, fire-breathing retiree who snapped at innocent delivery people for no reason.

I took the elevator to the 10th floor and made my way down a long, carpeted corridor with ambient lighting to #10, at the west end of the building. I lifted the brass knocker on a dark blue door, then released it. The door opened a few moments later, and a woman in her 60s with frizzy, chestnut hair peeked out. I was preparing to extinguish a breath of dragon fire, but instead, a face with large, worried eyes behind glasses stared back at me. She wore an art smock with paint smears over a turtleneck and jeans.

"Next time, just drop them there, that's fine," she said.

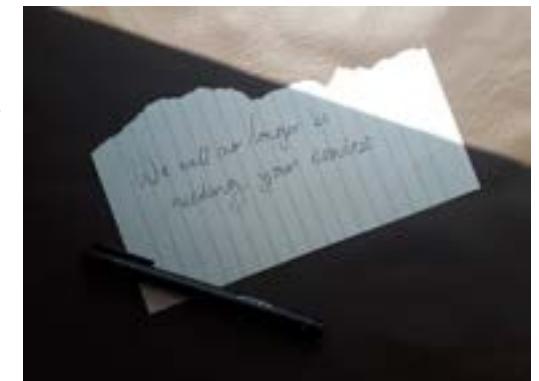
Her voice had a hesitancy to it, as if accustomed to receiving more bad than good news. I was ready to hand her the two bulging bags, but she invited me in, asking me to put them on her kitchen counter. It was then that I noticed the paintings. The walls of her tiny living room were covered in them: landscapes, still-life studies and half-finished portraits. A TV sat darkened against one wall. A few canvases awaiting final touches stood on easels in between armchairs, as if participants in conversations. The works had a naive, untrained quality to them, which added to their charm. We chatted about cheap paints, stretching canvases and choosing subject matter, and Marjorie asked me for my opinion on her works. During our conversation, Marjorie revealed she had terminal cancer and had taken up painting to not think about it. In those days, there was no text messaging, so once an employee was out on the street, they were untethered from constant check-ins.

She offered me a chair and tea; time flew by, then I remembered that I had a job to get back to and said goodbye, returning to the store with a whole new perspective on Marjorie to challenge my colleagues' biases.

The scribblings in cursive on the torn piece of paper looked like a right-handed person testing their left-handed skills. I read each word slowly:

We will no longer be needing your services.

It took me a few seconds to realize that I was being let go. No meeting or formal letter typed on company stationery, names stated or a manager's signature. No envelope. Just scribbles on a torn piece of paper done in a hurry, and given to a colleague to give to me.



I then recalled a week prior, the new owner standing a few feet from the cash desk, watching me as I checked items out for customers, making me feel uncomfortable but oblivious to my fate.

A flood of "whys" rained on me. Why me? What did I do? Paranoia settled in as I questioned whether assigning me Marjorie's delivery was arranged on purpose, to deal me the final coup de grâce.

I left my job that day without seeing or addressing the owner or my absent manager, and without saying goodbye to my colleagues, with whom I had worked for two years.

My firing wasn't dramatic, peppered with criticisms; I guess I was lucky to be spared a patronising speech about how much I was "valued," despite being disposable.

But the way it was done simply didn't align with my values, the philosophy of the health industry, and personalized customer care. It didn't align with larger professional companies either.

My thoughts shifted to the delivery for Marjorie, which may have taken too long. This would be my first time losing a job for spending too much time with a terminally ill customer suffering from loneliness.

Looking back, I should've pushed back and demanded clarity and professionalism after being given the note. It took me years to learn that giving push-back is not an isolated, self-centered defense. It lays the groundwork for a healthier workspace for everyone by demanding accountability from hierarchy. I should've asked questions, accepted only a formal notice and inquired about severance pay. I should've let everyone know that Marjorie was a sweetheart, once you got to know her.

Because the process of ending a relationship, punctuating a passage of time and commitment, deserves respect.

SUE EL-DRIDGE-TURI Sue Eldridge-Turi is a freelance painter, illustrator and writer, crafting stories from her empty nest located just outside of Montreal, near the Thousand Islands of the St. Lawrence River. She also enjoys cooking, writing poetry and being au contraire when needed.

ALEX ANDY PHUONG

Alex Andy Phuong earned his bachelor of arts in English from California State University, Los Angeles in 2015. Emma Stone inspired him to write passionately after he heard the song "Audition (The Fools Who Dream)" from *La La Land*.

Travels Across Time and Space

Alex Andy Phuong

The ideals of a utopian society
Are filled with wonder and majesty,
And given the reality of life on Earth,
It is up to oneself to live a life full of worth,
So respect the world as a whole
With a heart full of love
And a soulful soul,
And by striving for a life
That is absolutely wonderful,
Then there would be ways
To promote peace
Through the choice
To lend a voice
While letting hatred cease,
And by moving on
Long after the break of dawn,
Then there would be a golden opportunity
To live with authenticity
So that a global community
Would celebrate its own diversity,
So start to spread love
Rather than hate
Starting right now
Rather than wait
Travels Across Time and Space

The Ball Kid's Perspective

Prateek Sur

Photo by
Christian
Tenguan

Leo used to dream in serves and volleys. Every bounce of the tennis ball was a heartbeat, every line on the court a boundary of his ambition. He'd spent countless hours at the local club, mimicking his heroes, convinced his future was etched in the chalk dust of Centre Court. He was good, too. Not prodigy-level, but good enough to be noticed, good enough to be told he had a real shot. Then, at 16, he got the ultimate gig: ball kid for the Canadian Open.

It was supposed to be inspiring, a glimpse behind the curtain of greatness. Instead, it was . . . a lot of sweat. And spit. And muttered curses. From his vantage point, crouched at the net or sprinting along the baseline, the game transformed. The graceful ballet he'd admired on TV became a brutal, grinding machine. The heroes he'd idolized were often petulant, demanding and surprisingly fragile.

He saw the raw, unvarnished truth. The world-ranked player who threw his racket in a fit of pique, narrowly missing Leo's head. The celebrated champion who refused to make eye contact, treating the ball kids as invisible cogs in his personal glory machine. The constant, gnawing anxiety in their eyes, even when they



were winning. He saw the physical toll—the strained muscles, the taped ankles, the grimaces hidden behind towels. He smelled the liniment, the desperation, the stale air of a dream slowly suffocating under the weight of expectation.

One afternoon, during a particularly grueling five-setter, Leo was positioned at the net. The sun beat down, baking the court. The players, two top-20 titans, were locked in a battle of attrition. Leo watched as one, a stoic veteran he'd once admired, missed an easy overhead. The player didn't smash his racket or yell. He just stood there, shoulders slumped, a look

of utter exhaustion and profound sadness washing over his face. It was a look Leo recognized, a look he'd seen in the mirror after his own disappointing losses, but magnified a thousand times.

Later, during a changeover, Leo was handing out towels and drinks. He overheard snippets of conversation between the players and their coaches. It wasn't about the joy of the game, the thrill of competition. It was about endorsements, ranking points, avoiding fines, managing injuries, the next flight, the next hotel. It was a job,

a high-stakes, high-pressure, soul-crushing job.

He remembered his own practices, the relentless drills, the pressure from his parents, the unspoken expectation that he would make something of his talent. He remembered the dread that had started to creep in before matches, the feeling that he was performing for others, not for himself. He remembered the moment the thwack of the ball had stopped being a heartbeat and started being a hammer blow.

After that tournament, Leo found it harder and harder to pick up his own racket. The courts at his club, once a sanctuary, now felt like a stage. Every rally felt like an audition. He saw the faces of the pros, their strained smiles and forced camaraderie, superimposed over his own game. The joy was gone, replaced by a cynical understanding of the machine behind the sport.

His coach called, his parents asked, his friends wondered why he wasn't playing as much. He mumbled excuses about school, about needing a break. But the truth was, he couldn't unsee what he'd seen. He couldn't unhear the desperate grunts, the forced politeness, the sheer, overwhelming burden of it all.

One day, he walked past the local community center. Through the open doors, he heard laughter, not the polite applause of a stadium, but genuine, unrestrained laughter. He peered inside. On a slightly scuffed court, a group of elderly men and women were playing doubles. Their serves were slow, their volleys often missed, their footwork . . . well, it was enthusiastic, to be kind. But their faces were alight with pure, unadulterated fun.

They weren't playing for rankings, or prize money, or endorsements. They were playing for the sheer joy of it, for the camaraderie, for the simple pleasure of hitting a ball over a net.

Leo watched for a long time. He saw a woman, probably in her 70s, miss an easy shot and burst into giggles. Her partner, a man with a twinkle in his eye, just patted her on the back and smiled. There was no judgment, no frustration, just acceptance and shared enjoyment.

He walked in, hesitantly. A friendly face, a woman with a bright pink visor, waved him over. "Need a fourth?" she asked, her voice warm and inviting. Leo, for the first time in months, felt a flicker of something familiar, something good. He picked up a spare racket, a battered old thing with a loose grip, and stepped onto the court.

His first serve was a fault. His second was a weak slice. He missed an easy volley. But no one cared. They just laughed, encouraged him and kept playing. And as the afternoon wore on, as the sun streamed through the dusty windows, Leo found himself laughing too. He wasn't thinking about his footwork, or his backhand, or his potential career. He was just playing. He was just hitting the ball. And for the first time since he'd become a ball kid,

the thwack of the racket against the ball sounded like music again.

He didn't know if he'd ever be a champion. He didn't even know if he wanted to be. But he knew, with a certainty that settled deep in his bones, that he wanted to keep playing. Not for the glory, not for the applause, but for the simple, unadulterated joy of the game itself. He had seen the top of the mountain, and it was bleak. But he had also found a forgotten valley, filled with laughter and the pure, unburdened sound of a tennis ball bouncing, just for fun.

Inkant

Will Dewgrave

The toff doffed 'is tophat to what he saw before him perused
The upstart crow crew cried crowed canonized their own in due
Dew time it is mourning see dawn atop the mountains
Cavorting in the fountains as the bounteousness blends borne
Upon the brine that's shorn from crested peak with our satellite's pull popcorning off
Molecularly subatomically each tiny unit set to flee algorithmically by cyber means
Cybernetics screened via seamless alchemy
Taught concurrently to programming and biochemistry in universities and academies obfuscated into enigmacy
Animated animus is everything in the nexus of our lexicated (or is it verbalized?) thematized locuses (not in this context re: the above, but it might just be loci)
(Now why would that do !?)
Bracketry I'm sending supple shift into new graphemes harder than graphene no matter the graphics mapping 'em
Across here your readee ready to rip through more verses free so that we can agree on what's seen and how we can
augment our means neuronically
Neurotically I push words where they ain't meant to be
This symbolizes where my pupils trancing
But it's normalized by optic node
Before by my cortex molded into meaninglessness I then crush down and compress into my epigenetics
Switches twitch at the pace of eyelashes as they chatter natter ratter clank combining divinely according to rank
These are my building schematics for this my body as a tank
A directed energy weapon fired from fingertip
As I crack a quip off my leaden lips spit a sensuously sedulously sullener note by my throat
So the boat I keep upon the ocean moat will stay another day afloat
Who knows maybe someday soon some gay goon will enter the room and it'll begin something new
Where I'm not eschewed

“Everyone experiences stress to some degree, but [...] some of us are better equipped than others to deal with it.”

Am I Stressed?

Jayne Seagrave

“ I'm stressed.” How often do we hear someone say that phrase? How often do you say it? Every day? Every week? Every month?

I had always believed stress was something that happened to other people—it was not for me, it was a 21st century health issue and I am very much a 20th century gal . . . but it seems even a gal enveloped in a previous time can attract this malady, So, with the reluctant acceptance that I was stressed and did not want to join this crowd and needed to address it, I did what every other human being on-line does—researched the issue of stress on the internet and learned quite a bit. Time to share . . .

Stress—it seems to me, is an expression now part of our lexicon in a way it was not in the past. Why is that? As a race, are we becoming more stressed,

or is it that the word has become overused,

and is applied to situations that are not actually stressful at all? I needed clarification. I needed to know if I was actually stressed or just using the term as an excuse.

According to the World Health Organization, stress is defined as a state of worry and mental tension caused by a difficult situation. It is experienced when something new or unexpected threatens us, over

which we have no control.

Some of the most stressful incidents include the death of a parent, spouse, family member or close friend; divorce; the sale of a property; exams and serious health issues.

Everyone experiences stress to some degree, but we all respond to it in different ways, and some of us are better equipped than others to deal with it. Apparently, our ability to cope can depend on genetics, personality, life experiences, support networks, and our personal, social and economic circumstances. In addition, if stress is triggered when an individual is already in a vulnerable situation, then the consequences are increased. For example, if you have serious health issues and then a close family member suddenly dies, the two stressful situations compound each other.

Stress affects both the mental and physical parts of the body. While a little bit of stress can be beneficial,

keeping us on our toes and adding adrenalin, too much can lead to serious health problems. Learning how to cope with it and understand it is the key to recognizing and addressing it.

My internet research showed the signs of stress to be extensive and diverse. It can manifest in anxiety and irritability, and if left unaddressed, can develop to anxiety and depression. Individuals experiencing stress say they find it difficult to concentrate. It can lead to headaches, upset stomachs, chest pains, trouble sleeping and declining sexual desire. Many try to address it by increasing pre-existing health issues, such as alcohol and substance abuse. How easy it is to justify another glass of wine and escape in the haze of inebriation to help forget life's challenges.

As stress progresses, it can affect daily functioning, such as going to school or work, and lead to over or under-eating. More concerning is that it effects relationships with family and friends. Suddenly you are

developing into a difficult person, preoccupied with one overriding issue.

The good news is researchers and those studying stress have provided numerous ways it can be managed. Many of these suggestions are also advocated as a mechanism for addressing other ailments:

1. Keep a routine. This helps, as an individual feels they are in control.
2. Get plenty of sleep. Sleep repairs and rejuvenates the body.
3. Connect with others and create a social circle.
4. Eat healthily.
5. Exercise.
6. Limit time on social media.

So, while I still might be stressed, at least now I am halfway to knowing why, and more importantly understand the steps that need to be taken to cope and tackle it.

JAYNE

SEA-
GRAVE

Jayne Seagrave is a BC bestselling author. The ninth edition of her book *Camping British Columbia, the Rockies and the Yukon* was published by Heritage House in April 2023. Over 60,000 of her camping books have been sold. She also writes fiction, non-fiction and freelance articles, and occasionally teaches writing and publishing courses. Recently retired, she spends her free time travelling internationally and in the province she adores, learning the French language, exercising, and writing.

My Beloved, Broken Compass

Prateek Sur

The jungle, they say, has a way of finding your weaknesses and exploiting them with the ruthless efficiency of a tax auditor. For me, that weakness was direction. Not in a metaphorical, existential sense—I knew precisely where my life was going, which was usually downhill and at an alarming speed—but in the literal, cardinal points kind of way. North, south, east, west: a baffling quartet of abstract concepts that consistently eluded my grasp. Which is why, when my expedition into the uncharted Amazonian basin went spectacularly, predictably and quite hilariously off-course, my only companion was a compass. Not just any compass, mind you, but “The Wanderer,” an antique brass contraption with a needle that spun like a dervish on a caffeine high, inherited from my great-aunt Mildred, a woman whose sense of direction was so legendary she once navigated a canoe through a hurricane using only the faint scent of freshly baked scones.

“Well, old friend,” I muttered to The Wanderer, tapping its perpetually agitated face, “this is a fine mess you’ve gotten us into.”

The compass, naturally, offered no reply, merely continuing its frantic pirouette, a silent testament to



Photo by
Vadim
Sadovski

its profound disinterest in conventional navigation. It was, by all accounts, broken.

Utterly, irrevocably, gloriously broken.

Yet, for reasons I couldn't quite articulate, I trusted it more than any GPS, any map, any seasoned guide who claimed to know the difference between a kapok tree and a particularly aggressive fern.

We had been lost for what felt like weeks, though my internal clock, usually as reliable as a politician's promise, had long since dissolved into a sticky, humid mess. The dense canopy above filtered the sun into a perpetual twilight, and the air hung thick and wet, a suffocating blanket woven from humidity and the buzzing symphony of a million unseen insects. My supplies were dwindling faster than my patience, and my last packet of instant coffee had been consumed three days ago, a tragedy of epic proportions that I still hadn't fully processed.

"Left," I'd say to The Wanderer, pointing vaguely into the verdant abyss. The needle would twitch, then settle, with an almost imperceptible shudder, pointing resolutely to the right. "Right it is, then," I'd sigh, and follow its illogical decree. And somehow, against all logic, against every instinct that screamed "this way lies certain doom," it always led me somewhere. Not necessarily somewhere good, mind you. Once, it led me to a nest of rather indignant fire ants. Another time, to a waterfall that looked suspiciously like a giant, angry mouth. But never, not once, did it lead me back to where I started. Which, given my innate talent for getting hopelessly turned around, was a minor miracle in itself.

My current predicament involved a rather impressive, and equally inconvenient, ravine. The Wanderer, with its usual flair for the dramatic, had pointed directly into its gaping maw.

"Are you quite sure, old chap?" I'd asked, peering down into the shadowy depths.

The needle, for once, held steady, vibrating with an almost smug certainty. So I began the perilous descent, clinging to vines that felt suspiciously like sentient snakes and praying that my tetanus shots were up to date.

Hours later, scraped, bruised and convinced I'd contracted at least three new tropical diseases, I reached the bottom. It was less a ravine and more a subterranean cavern, dimly lit by phosphorescent fungi that

clung to the damp walls like forgotten dreams. The air was cool, almost refreshing, a welcome respite from the oppressive heat above. And in the centre of the cavern, bathed in the eerie glow of the fungi, stood a structure. It was a monolith, impossibly smooth and black, rising from the damp earth like a forgotten tooth. And etched into its surface, glowing with the same faint light, was a symbol. A compass rose. Identical to the one on The Wanderer.

My heart, usually a stoic organ content with its rhythmic thumping, gave a rather undignified leap. "Well, I'll be," I whispered, pulling The Wanderer from my pocket.

The needle, which had been spinning wildly since we'd entered the cavern, now settled. It pointed directly at the monolith. And then, with a soft click, it stopped. Utterly still. For the first time since I'd inherited it, The Wanderer was no longer wandering.

I approached the monolith, my hand outstretched, a strange sense of familiarity washing over me. It felt . . . right. As if I had been searching for this place my entire life, guided by a broken compass that was, in fact, leading me precisely where I needed to be. My fingers brushed against the smooth, cool surface of the monolith, tracing the lines of the compass rose. As I did, the glowing lines intensified, and a low hum vibrated through the cavern, a sound that resonated deep within my bones.

And then, a voice. Not a voice in my ears, but in my mind. Clear, resonant, and

utterly devoid of emotion.

"Welcome, Seeker. You have arrived."

I jumped back, tripping over a particularly robust mushroom. "Who's there?" I demanded, my voice echoing strangely in the cavern.

"We are the Architects," the voice replied. "And you are our latest subject."

"Subject?" I repeated, my mind racing. "Subject of what?"

"The Simulation," the voice stated, with the detached precision of a Wikipedia entry. "This 'jungle,' this 'expedition,' your 'broken compass'—all meticulously crafted elements of a bespoke reality de-

signed to test the limits of human resilience under pressure."

I preened slightly. "Well, I do try."

I stared at the monolith, then at The Wanderer, which remained stubbornly still in my hand. "You're telling me . . . this isn't real? The leeches? The fever dreams? The distinct lack of decent coffee?"

"All programmed variables," the voice confirmed. "The leeches were a biofeedback mechanism. The fever dreams, a neurological stress test. And the coffee . . . a deprivation stimulus designed to heighten your sense of urgency."

"So, my entire life has been a giant, elaborate psychological experiment?

I felt a hysterical laugh bubbling up.

And my great-aunt Mildred . . . she was in on it?"

"Great-Aunt Mildred was a highly advanced AI construct," the voice corrected. "Her 'legendary sense of direction' was merely her programming guiding you through the initial phases of the simulation. The Wanderer is a sophisticated quantum entanglement device, designed to subtly influence your perception of reality and guide you towards key trigger points."

"So, it wasn't broken?" I asked, a strange mix of betrayal and grudging admiration swirling within me. "It was just . . . working in mysterious ways?"

"Precisely," the voice replied. "Its 'brokenness' was a feature, not a bug. It forced you to rely on intuition, to trust the illogical, to embrace the unknown. These are crucial qualities for the next stage."

"Next stage?" I asked, dread coiling in my stomach. "There's a next stage?"

"Indeed. The purpose of this simulation was to identify individuals capable of navigating complex, unpredictable realities. You have demonstrated exceptional aptitude. Your ability to maintain a degree of sarcastic humour even in the face of existential dread was particularly noteworthy."

"Your 'expedition' was merely a training exercise. The 'uncharted Amazonian basin' is, in fact, a highly advanced virtual reality environment. And the 'pressure' you felt was not merely environmental, but the carefully calibrated cognitive load designed to push you to your limits."

"So, what now?" I asked, looking around the cavern, which now seemed less like a natural formation and more like a very elaborate loading screen. "Do I get a prize? A lifetime supply of actual coffee?"

"Your prize," the voice intoned, "is the truth. And the opportunity to join us. To become an Architect. To design and manage realities for others."

I considered this. Designing realities. Crafting intricate simulations. Orchestrating existential crises for unsuspecting subjects. It sounded . . . rather appealing, actually. And the thought of being on the other side of the pressure, rather than perpetually under it, was undeniably tempting.

"So, my beloved, broken compass," I said, holding The Wanderer up to the glowing monolith, "You were never really broken at all. You were just . . . a very effective recruiter."

The needle, still perfectly still, seemed to shimmer with a faint, knowing light. And for the first time, I understood. The pressure wasn't just the jungle, or the deadlines or the lack of coffee. It was the pressure of choice. The pressure of knowing that my entire reality had been a meticulously constructed illusion. And the ultimate twist? I wasn't just a subject. I was a candidate. And the real test had just begun. The pressure, it seemed, was about to get very, very real. And I, for one, was finally ready to embrace it. After all, I had a lot of sarcastic humour to unleash on my future subjects. And perhaps, just perhaps,

I could program in a decent coffee machine.

"Fear is part of the journey—but it's also what gives it meaning."

The Terrifying Excitement of Being an Entrepreneur

Ana Kely Braga

In today's globalized world, entrepreneurship has become almost a necessity for many. Just look around and you'll see how people are finding ways to reinvent themselves in the face of challenges that demand greater skills—especially when it comes to household budgets. This became even more evident after we endured a global pandemic. For many, such moments are a turning point: either the business grows, or it's time to walk away. It's in this scenario that we realize just how thrilling and, at the same time, frightening this sometimes bittersweet experience can be.

The paradox of entrepreneurship

Those who decide to turn a dream into reality often face a mix of emotions: enthusiasm and fear. Being an entrepreneur is like fixing a plane while flying it—no matter how organized your ideas and schedules may be, it's impossible to predict when you'll have to recalculate your path. The excitement comes from owning your own business, growing it and achieving success in the field you've chosen. Yet, this same journey is shaped by external factors—the local and global economy, political changes and unexpected crises—all of which can deeply affect results.

The thrill of creating from scratch and the constant fear of failure

Entrepreneurship stirs something deep within. Creating something of your own is like raising a child—it begins with high hopes and dreams of a bright future, one that will bring pride and rewards over time. When that project takes shape, it brings a sense of autonomy, passion, purpose and optimism. But quietly, unwelcome visitors also arrive: doubts about whether your product or service will be accepted, fear of financial instability, pressure for quick and constant results and the inevitable comparisons with competitors. What once felt like pure passion can turn into anxiety about debt, criticism and declining revenue.

Three pillars to navigate the journey

1. Making solitary and risky decisions

Entrepreneurs carry the solitude of leadership. In moments of crisis, the most important decisions often fall squarely on their shoulders, even when there's a team involved. At such times, it's essential to act with clarity and avoid impulsive choices that

could jeopardize years of work. Periods of difficulty can also be opportunities to develop new skills, cut unnecessary costs and find creative alternatives. Learning more about marketing, sales strategies and financial management may be the key to survival and future growth.

2. Personal growth and resilience

Entrepreneurship changes people. No one finishes this journey the same as when they began. Mistakes and failures, though painful, are valuable lessons that allow you to adjust your course and reach greater heights. More than professional development, the entrepreneurial path builds self-confidence and strengthens a growth mindset.

3. Balancing emotion and strategy

The entrepreneurial experience is not all emotion, not all reason—

the key lies in finding balance.

Entrepreneurs fight daily internal battles, so paying attention to their own feelings is crucial. A strong support network—whether family, friends or mentors—plays an essential role in maintaining emotional health. Planning, strategy and rational thinking form the triad for overcoming challenges. Above all, the pleasure of entrepreneurship must remain intact—

no one wants to live a nightmare

inside their own dream.

Move forward despite fear

On the road to entrepreneurship, there will always be obstacles, detours and unforeseen events. Maybe the plane needs maintenance, maybe it's time to refuel or maybe the pilot simply needs a moment to rest. Fear is part of the journey—but it's also what gives it meaning. True entrepreneurial spirit lies in recognizing that, when faced with the choice between fear and passion, the best path is to keep moving forward. It's in that forward motion that life's best surprises may appear—and only those who keep walking will ever experience them.

GRACE CHENG Grace has an accounting and finance background. She enjoys reading, writing, listening to music, watching movies and playing sports.

Finding My Way Back to Joy

Grace Cheng

Photo by Robin Worall

I once believed happiness was for others, unreachable for me. Surrounded by laughter and shining faces, I drifted unseen, kept apart by an invisible mist.

This is for anyone who has tried to clutch happiness and seen it slip away. I hope that my words bring a gentle light to spark a glimmer of hope in the darkness.

For years, happiness was a language I could not speak. Each burst of laughter made me feel even more distant, and I faced a choice: hide behind a mask or search for my own happiness. Though uncertain, I chose to search. That decision marked the beginning of a new chapter in my journey.

Even surrounded by love, I felt alone. My smile became a fragile shield, holding me together as challenges grew.

As I grew older, my feelings deepened and the pressure to look put-together increased. Each comparison made my achievements feel smaller. Social media comments made me question my worth. I became a background character in my life, my smile

a mask. One day, I knew I could not go on like this. Later, sharing moments with others who had weathered similar storms, I learned I was not alone: even the seemingly unbreakable are human. I found a community and picked up self-help books—not to fix myself, but to find the source of my pain. At first, the words felt distant. But in time, I saw a pattern: I was giving so much to others that I lost myself.

Speaking, even in a whisper, was the most helpful. I admitted, “I am hurting and need someone.” I shared this over coffee, on walks, with those close and those who might not understand. Though afraid, I let them see my flaws. They did not turn away. They listened and stayed. I felt a sense of relief and realized I did not have to carry my burden alone. I could be myself and let others help. My life shifted. Happiness became a choice each morning. I savored fresh coffee, warm showers, crisp air and the sound of my heartbeat. I laughed—truly laughed, no longer behind a mask.

Adulthood brought comfort as I centered it on myself. I stepped away from harsh comparisons. Each day, I reminded myself that every journey is unique. Mine may be quiet, even messy, but it is truly my own.



With this perspective, adulthood felt lighter. I focused on my own path and reminded myself it was okay to be different. The urge to compare remained, but I met it with kindness. I recalled my progress and anchored myself in breath and gratitude. Happiness is not calm; it is the courage to show flaws and keep moving, seeking the spark that carries you forward.

There are still days when I feel that old heaviness creeping back in—the pressure, the doubt, the comparison. But now, I meet those feelings with kindness instead of frustration. I remind myself of how far I have come, of the quiet strength it took to get here.

When I look back, I see a younger version of me who just wanted to be loved and to feel enough. And I wish I could tell that version of me “You always were.”

I no longer chase happiness. Instead, I nurture it—slowly, patiently, intentionally. I create it through small daily choices: taking care of my mind, spending time with people who make me feel safe and doing things that bring me peace.

My journey is not over, but I no longer search for happiness as if it is missing. Even on hard days, I know I am enough.

Happiness is found within. I see it in small moments and simple gifts. If I slow down, I find reasons to be grateful. I can pause, stop comparing and be kind to myself. There is no single roadmap to happiness, but if I keep moving, trust in deeper joy and ignite my spark, I will find it. The first step was mine—claim it and happiness can be yours too.

If you have felt unloved or that happiness is out of reach, you are not alone. Peace is not something from a manual; it is written each day. Be gentle with yourself and patient with the healing process. The happiness you seek is within you, waiting to be seen.

Photo by
Brooke
Cagle



Photo by Robin Worrall

