



Generation Empath.

by Red G. B.

INTRO

Is **family** instinctual?

Why else would humans accept perversion and abuse?

At birth, the soul must have a preconceived notion that those who receive its human body will provide what it needs to acclimate. Even if the parents' actions induce negative feelings or physical pain, the mind communicates: "if mother/father is doing this, there must be a purpose I have yet to understand."

Extreme suffering results when the child matures and never discovers a link between their parents' behavior and a valuable lesson.

Great suffering precedes great renewal.

We are generation empath.

CHAPTER 1: DUTY

"NON NOBIS SOLUM NATI SUMUS (NOT FOR OURSELVES ALONE ARE WE BORN)."

MARCUS TULIUS CICERO, 44 B.C.

My dad told me one of my toddler nicknames was "Duty" because I enjoyed completing tasks for others. He and my mom knew I was bright and had potential.

"Bunny Rabbit" was because of my prominent two front teeth, and "Peanut" was because of my love for peanut butter sandwiches. They stopped celebrating my tastes and quirks as I matured and named me "Selfish" and "Temperamental."

I did not undergo catechism or don the white, doll-looking dresses I see on my siblings in old, square photographs, but my existence is a direct product of Catholicism.

Roman Catholics view artificial contraception as immoral for married couples, advising in the 1980's to practice "the rhythm method" if they wish to minimize the chance of pregnancy. My parents adopted this method 9 years after the birth of my oldest sister, which resulted in 7

pregnancies over the course of 8 years, 5 of which became me and my siblings.

As I've only learned in adulthood, avoiding sex during ovulation does substantially reduce the risk of pregnancy. The church, however, boasting more knowledge about the female reproductive system than women themselves, provided a "standard clock" of fertility that is marked on a calendar.

There was no logical reason to remove contraception from the family of 3 my parents had been sustaining. As our numbers grew, the family space and resources declined with no back-up plan. Under Catholicism, however, Sunday dresses and church attendance were more important than quality of life.

When my mother was a young parent of 1, the family benefitted from state aid where my father's income fell short. When my mother became an older parent of 6, the family suffered because she and her husband promised themselves they would never be welfare recipients again.

My father was diagnosed with Crohn's disease as a teenager, an autoimmune disorder that rendered him generally unhealthy and susceptible to ailments. He maintained blue collar jobs until filing for disability sometime before I was born.

I believe it is around this time that they left the church. Likely a combination of shame and depression, my father parted resentfully where my mother quietly retained Catholic values.

Seven of us survived on a single disability check. Neither my father nor my mother were employed until I was about 9 years old.

One summer, I was 5 or 6, rain was like a gift from heaven as we would fill tubs for bathing. Our well had dried up and it took months to afford a new one. When it wasn't raining, we traveled to my grandfather's small apartment in the next town over to fill empty milk jugs with water.

I remember eagerly lugging the heavy containers down the steps and into the back of our minivan, the rough plastic digging into my little hands as I wondered how my mother could lift two of them so effortlessly.

A child's perspective is existential beauty in one of its purest forms. "Duty," the chubby-cheeked, dirty-blonde toddler, loved this small, country existence with freedom to explore. She laughed daily through dirt-caked lips, picked up every rock in her path, and followed her older sister and brothers through the vast, surrounding pastures.



CHAPTER 2: SEX

"WHEN I WAS 7, MY MOTHER AND FATHER HAD DRUNKEN SEX EVERY SATURDAY AT AN OUTRAGEOUS VOLUME WHILE WATCHING PORNOGRAPHY ON VHS AT A REASONABLE VOLUME."

RED G. B., 2023

It is likely that one white man in one marriage counseling session determined my existence. I wonder what he would think of this chapter.

Of course, it is my parents' blind devotion to a superior entity that is truly the catalyst here, but I still bore the brunt of some resentment for this man's misguidance.

I recall the pained groans coming from our single bathroom where my father spent much of his time. He had undergone a vasectomy not long before my mother had her tubes tied. They were open with us about the procedures and the fact that they didn't want to have any more children.

When I was 4, the family was watching *Hot Shots! Part Deux*, and Valeria Golino told Charlie Sheen she wanted to have sex with him.

"Ewwww!" exclaimed my older brothers and sister.

I was confused and asked my mother why they were disgusted, so she brought me to her bedroom and explained sex in anatomical terms. I accepted the explanation and didn't think much more of it.

Around the age of 7, I heard my parents having sex for the first time and began noticing a pattern that became more extreme as time went on.

Saturday night was family movie night, which was exciting because we would go the video store, choose one new release, one old release, and a 20oz pop for each of us that we weren't usually allowed to have.

When the tradition began, my parents would keep their brown paper bag in the freezer until we had finished the family movies and it was time for bed. They would then share a couple drinks, watch a movie of their choice, and retire to their room to have sex until they fell asleep.

Eventually, the brown paper bag and my mom's off-white silk robe would make appearances during our family movies while they slipped back and forth between the locked bedroom and the kitchen, not making eye contact with any of us.

I hated that robe. She was always naked beneath it and I knew it. She would tuck me and my sisters in at night in that robe and I tried to stall as long as I could. I knew what was coming next.

My time perception was not well-tuned, but I believe their routine went on for about a year while I anxiously prayed it would end. I knew what I was hearing was sex, but I could only imagine the strange visuals that paired with the graphic smacking, banging, and uninhibited groaning echoing through the wood paneling.

They began renting pornography when they grew bored of the large, camouflage print double-VHS box with *ORGY* stamped in orange letters on its side they kept in their closet. My dad would often leave the rentals stacked in plain sight in their clear plastic cases on the television so he wouldn't forget to return them.

I was no longer sleeping on Saturday nights. There was a radio next to my bed, so I would plug headphones in and listen to the popular stations. Even with 1990's censorship, Monifah's "Touch It" was an overtly sexual song that felt like it was accosting my little ears.

If I lifted up my headphones, however, I heard my mother's whining pleasure moans or the background music of the pornography they were playing, so I turned up the volume and wrapped the pillow tightly around my head.

I am still rendered uncomfortable by brazen sexuality and comforted by head pillows.

In spite of the graphic pornography exposed to me at an early age, I was encouraged to be submissive, gentle, and appropriate at all times.

My father would drop sexual innuendos as if we should be proud of him while my mother remained sheepishly silent and prayed that we didn't know the truth.

As a 7 year old, I addressed this in the only way I knew how. I told my mom remorsefully that I didn't fall asleep until 5:00am Sunday morning and she seemed alarmed.

"Well... were you listening to music or something?" she asked worriedly.



I was not even close to having the skills to tell her that the frequent sex and pornography was causing me anxiety, confusion, sleeplessness, and fear, so I told her that I listen to music but I don't like how sexual it is late at night.

She recommended I try another radio station.

CHAPTER 3: SCHOOL

“...OUT OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOL GROWS THE GREATNESS OF THE NATION.”*

MARK TWAIN, 1900

*QUOTE TAKEN WAY OUT OF CONTEXT. MARK TWAIN BELIEVED TRAVEL WAS THE BEST EDUCATOR AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS WERE STIFLING.

In spite of no sound routine at home, I excelled academically in elementary school and made friends easily. I was highly independent, goofy, and I liked the way that I looked. I had a few of what the school would call “behavioral issues,” but I knew I wasn’t a “Bad Kid.”

I heard my oldest sister was a *terrible* kid through school. I have a single memory of her running down the road to a friend’s house when I was 3 or 4 years old. I tried to follow her, but she yelled and motioned for me to stay home and I complied. She was supposed to be babysitting us, but was very adamant that she didn’t want to.

We were told years later by both of my parents that she had gotten drunk in protest while left in charge of us. This decision, along with many others that were openly shared with us as cautionary tales, gave her the name “Bad Teenager.”

Momentary brain scream: *It couldn't have possibly been that she was suddenly forced into a punitive community that encouraged childbirth to the extent that she had to suddenly accept and be responsible for 5 siblings, strict expectations, and new traditions all while undergoing puberty in absolute poverty with emotionally unavailable parents?!*

Bad Teenager left when I was 4 and she was 18, but my parents kept her legacy of chaos and bad choices alive and well within the yellowed walls of our 1,000 square foot home.

I was 9 when my mother began working at a convenience store full time, as school was now our primary source for personal development.

School taught me loads of facts about the world that I eagerly shared with my parents, continuing to be praised for demonstrating high intelligence for my age.

School also engrained in me that I was much poorer and therefore less worthy than most kids, that most boys were bullies like my brother, and that I would be reprimanded for misunderstandings and norms that I was supposed to grasp out of thin air.

I enjoyed the friends, positive feedback from school, and the praise it earned me at home, but summertime turned off that switch.

My father remained unemployed but was still frequently away from home in the daytime. When he was home, we were usually outside so we didn't bother him as he chain-smoked, drank Heaven Hill rum with RC Cola, and watched television.

My older brothers were both verbally abusive, but the younger of the two terrorized me and my sisters during that time with disrespect, insults, and physical abuse.

I was once worried that my brother would die because our older brother was strangling him in the next room. My dad sat comfortably in his chair and told me that he deserved it through puffs of his Basic smoke.

If my father did intervene, it was to belittle my brothers with anger and violence while we looked on in horror.

My second oldest sister was born with a genetic abnormality that caused her brain to under-develop and she experienced seizures from a young age. She was frequently the target of sibling abuse for her lack of understanding and tendencies to act out.

In one instance, she called 911 because we were attacking her and she had no one to help her. When my parents

came home, they gave us a stern lecture about only calling 911 for true emergencies, but continued to leave us unattended.

The consequence my brother endured for abusing his siblings was to be subjected to further abuse. A paddle with holes drilled into its wood hung threateningly from my parents' closet door, but they usually opted for faux-leather belts. The rest of us felt this wrath occasionally, but not like my brother.

My mother said that he was "Mean" since he was able to walk. I can only imagine what his first year of life must have been like to have earned that name by age 1.

One of the most haunting memories of sibling abuse was not being punched, kicked, or degraded, it was when I had crammed myself into the corner of the dining room behind a wooden chair, crumpling to the floor and begging Mean brother not to beat me up for something I had said.



He stopped pursuing me, but his face twisted into disgust and shame before he turned his back on his pathetic pile of a sister.

In spite of our numbers, it was an incredibly isolating upbringing.

CHAPTER 4: DEATH & DEAD WEIGHT

“...THAT MAN SHALL BECOME AWARE OF AND CONSCIOUSLY BE REUNITED WITH THE DIVINE SOURCE OF HIMSELF WITHOUT TASTING OF PHYSICAL DISSOLUTION.”

MANLY P. HALL , 1928

My father died of lung and brain cancer in 1999 just before I turned 11. My oldest sister was visiting for Independence Day and our dad collapsed in the shower and fell unconscious. I can still see my sister vividly flagging down the ambulance in the middle of our country road.

He was given a terminal diagnosis and survived the 3 months of the summer at home with the help of a Hospice nurse named Nancy.

Nancy was a plump, freckly woman with blonde hair in her late middle age with translucent-framed glasses. I do not recall any of her words, but her warm presence and laugh are unforgettable.

My father was very vocal and direct about his distaste for fat people, which my brothers were happy to adopt. I learned quickly that there were also very different standards for guys vs. girls, because my overweight oldest brother was able to freely mock our youngest sister's developing body.

I was naturally thin until puberty, when the complete lack of nutrition awareness and poor diet were able to catch up with me. Frozen Salisbury steaks with artificial mashed potatoes were always followed by a Pepperidge Farm cake split six ways. I legitimately believed strawberry Pop Tarts were a healthy breakfast into my teens.

Many of the kindest souls I have encountered have been housed in overweight bodies. It makes me wonder if either of my parents had ever really connected with someone else's soul, or if they hand-picked who deserved their attention based on physical form alone.

Momentary philosopher mode: *Perhaps, the proper question to ask is: "How well did your parents know their own souls?"*

It is clear to me now that my father was very depressed for years leading up to his death. He was an intelligent man who attempted to do right by serving in the military and seeking employment to support his family, but his poor health and negative perspective always deterred him.

American Capitalism has absolutely no room for the sad and decrepit, so he was at the mercy of the Social Security system to support him and his dependents in a culture that didn't talk about mental health.

Today, it is easy for me to detach myself from his wrongdoings because I know he was merely a husk of himself for the entire 10 years I knew him.

My mother continued to work full time while my father lay in the hospital bed that replaced their waterbed-with-mirrored-headboard in their bedroom.

I remember his pained moans and sobs bellowing from the room as his brain swelled against his skull. On one occasion, he tried to orally ingest his liquid morphine. I am not certain if the intent was to kill himself or just ease the pain.

It was at least pleasant when Nancy would visit.

He was not supposed to walk unassisted and had a fall alert necklace and phone system set up. On one occasion, he tried to collect wood for the stove inside, fell forward, and punctured his forehead on a stick. I watched through the back door's glass as blood poured to the ground and he struggled to stand up. As he hobbled towards the door, I retreated to my room.

My father and youngest brother were in the process of building a shed next to the house that summer. My brother had tried to continue the work in his free time, but it became clear one day that my father did not approve. He climbed atop the partially completed structure and clumsily dangled his legs off the edge while holding a serrated saw.

In horror, a few of us tried to coax him down with our worried pleading, but he mumbled that the shed just wasn't right and needed to come down. I could see something different in my brother's eyes in those moments.

He eventually came down safely and was given a stern lecture by my mother when she got home that day. The shed was never completed.

My dad still smoked cigarettes and drank alcohol once he was able to sit in a chair. I can only assume he had run out of cigarettes one day and determined he would simply go get some.

He dressed and made it out into the little red rusted Dodge Omni in the rock driveway, rolling it a few feet backwards while attempting to get it started. My brothers were able to thwart his attempt, but not without bearing the brunt of his intense rage. My mother gave him a stern lecture when she got home.

There was one different kind of moment that occurred during my dad's death that I'm not sure anyone else was afforded. I was standing on my tiptoes peering at nature through the back door's glass when he hugged me from behind, sobbed, and said "I love you."

I froze, remained silent, and waited for him to walk away. He had never said or done anything like that before. I could hear remorse in his voice.

The day my dad died, there were family members' cars in the driveway to signal us when we stepped off the school bus. My mom said we should each take some time to say goodbye to him, so I sat next to his gurney and robotically stated:

"Goodbye dad, I love you."

I was channeling what I had seen in movies, but my final moments with my dad were anticlimactic. It was just me, in a pale yellow room, talking awkwardly to my dad's lifeless body.

In the absence of spirituality, I had a very pragmatic concept of death. My maternal grandmother died before I was born and the rest passed before I was a teen. I never saw my parents' grief, but frustration was plentiful over paperwork, phone calls, and handling the deceased's funeral and material possessions.

My father did not have a funeral. His body was donated to Michigan State University for medical study. A few years later, the university sent his ashes to us in a plastic bag inside of a cardboard box.

We opened the box to see them, but his remains were never placed in an urn.

CHAPTER 5: LET IT GO

I have never felt the absence of my father. I wonder sometimes if it is because, unknowingly, he did parent me indirectly through his treatment of my brothers and my mother.

When my brothers were running the house, all things deemed girlish or weak were bashed and destroyed. Excitement was to be immediately extinguished, and trying something new meant criticism and belittling.

Some of the square, faded photographs in my closet include me running around at 3 years old in nothing but blue jeans in the back yard just like my older brothers. I love what these scenes represent: a time without inhibition or societal poison.



Even as a shirtless tot, I knew that the sister 6 years my senior was not my role model, but more of a peer. She participated in the local Special Olympics and the special education program at school, but we weren't supposed to talk about her disability at home.

Forrest Gump was never allowed to be chosen for movie night to protect my sister's feelings. I always thought this was silly. A lead character who has a disability and loves to mow the lawn just like her could have been a great self-esteem booster.

Upon reflection, however, I am certain that the true intent was to avoid my brothers quoting the movie at her or turning it into a traumatic experience.

My disabled sister received some of the worst bullying in our household for her inability to run with the pack. After a particularly violent occurrence between Mean brother and our older sister, I heard my dad hollering at him:

"Get it through your thick skull, she is *retarded*!"

"Retard" was a very popular word in the 90's. Mean brother likely interpreted that as my dad *insulting* her.

Criticism was always the parenting style of choice, but when my mother became stressed, she would easily step over the line into bullying.

A professional wildlife photographer visited our elementary school and I was overwhelmingly inspired by the crisp colors and close-ups in the books he showed us.

As soon as I put down my backpack that evening, I was begging for some film to use to take my own nature photos. Both my mom and dad seemed supportive, so I excitedly ventured out to the pasture and wooded areas behind the house with the family's Kodak Tele-Ektralite.

This was old technology even for 1997, but I was perfectly happy with the little black box and felt like I was a real photographer. I snuck up on some roosting birds and tried to snap a shot, but they flew away before the shutter clicked.

A swarm of songbirds flew overhead and I raced down the path for a closer shot. I captured a few and felt the adrenaline pumping as I imagined what the developed images would be like.

I saw a beautiful cluster of cumulonimbus clouds blushing behind a perfectly rounded green hill and began running

as fast as I could, begging them not to disappear until I could get closer.

As I approached the clearing where I could see the full horizon, I breathed deeply and paused in awe of the beautiful landscape before me. The emerald green grass boldly contrasted the marshmallow clouds whose edges were dusted with pink and blue from the setting sun.

I snapped a couple perfect shots with a grin beaming across my face and headed back, using up the remaining roll of film on the wildlife I spotted during my walk home.

The day the pictures finally arrived, I was overjoyed. I raced out to the living room - but was quickly halted by the look of disgust on my mother's face as she thumbed through my work. Her agitation grew as she saw nothing of value in what I had photographed.

"These are just... junk! I mean... what is *this*?"



She flipped the photo of the hillside and fluffy clouds and held it exploitatively.

My heart was inside of my throat. I ripped the stack of photos from her hands and screamed as I angrily chucked them into the trash.

We never spoke about the photos again until I brought up the incident as an older teenager. I could see there was some remorse in her eyes as I told her calmly that it hurt me, but all my mom could say was:

"You need to let it go."

CHAPTER 6: GLACIER PLANET

Imagine you flickered to life as a baby flame on Glacier Planet. You've already spent years alone, trekking the treacherous fjords of permafrost while packing on layers of frozen metal and clay to keep your little fire burning.

You occasionally spot other armored flames - but, like you, they've packed themselves so tightly with Glacier Planet matter you can't tell if they're burning at all.

There is one muddied wanderer who lets you share his helmet for a little while and you feel warmth for the first time you can remember.

As you trudge on together through the frozen tundra, you find him more and more frequently nestled in the nucleus you've labored to protect for years. It seems unjust, but more warmth requires more protection.

Suddenly, you find yourself responsible for maintaining another flame. After all those years of painfully protecting your own! Another emerges, and another... There is no way the whole group will survive flickering around like holiday sparklers - protection is the primary prerogative.

You ignore the sound of the little flames' sputters, sizzles, and steam as you hurl the jagged chunks of ice and rock at them. You plead with them to armor themselves, but it is not in their nature, and they continue their volatile dances upon the frosty tundra.

Each day, Glacier Planet wakes up, and so must you. Your days are agony, but at least the wanderer sometimes warms you when you retreat within your shell. You've finally scrapped together the best shields and weapons you could on your own, and you know it's still not enough.

You begrudgingly drag the wanderer, his armor, and your armored posse of growing flames through unforgiving blizzards, your inner flame always telling you to move forward. This all has to be for *something*.

The day your flame extinguishes, as all Glacier Planet flames do, you become a puff of smoke lifted high into the sky, sifting through grey storm clouds that always cast a shadow on the wintery terrain below.

But Glacier Planet is vast. You soon see greenery and life. If only someone would have shown you your innate power to melt and destroy the surroundings that held you prisoner.

CHAPTER 7: FAMILY VALUES

My father was an atheist when I entered the world. He told us that God was invented by clever people to keep the less intelligent subordinate.

I remember him sharing a proud dadism as we all listened attentively. He said heaven is depicted as silently sitting on a cloud next to God. Hell is shown full of people dancing, partying, and having orgies... and we're supposed to *want* the cloud?

I was too young to understand nuance, so I took his sarcastic joke as truth and avoided or mocked all things spiritual or altruistic.

There was a thick black Holy Bible that sat in a drawer beneath Webster's Dictionary. I was told the names of all of my siblings were derived from it. I fluttered its thin pages a few times but never bothered to try and understand its strange wording.

Although I am happy to have missed out on practiced Catholicism, I always craved a deeper meaning that I never found independently at a young age. As far as I could remember, I had never felt a deep, soul connection with another human, and that connection did not exist.

The television and radio brought images and words about unconditional love and people deeply caring for each other. These were merely for entertainment purposes because they did not exist in the real world - like dragons or ghosts.

Our survivor Social Security benefits afforded our family a new computer with dial-up internet, so I sought human connection online. I wrote the poem "Yahoo! Chat" that explains my experience. It was not favorable.

While spending time on the computer, I had the misfortune of hearing my mother giggling on the phone in her bedroom that she "just gets so horny sometimes." This was a strange and uncomfortable moment that I hated - but it was also a very defining moment in my youth.

My 11 year old brain thinks: *Sex is what brought me here. Sex is not for kids, but adults talk about it and practice it all the time. Adults miss sex. Adults need sex. Sex is on television, on the radio, in movies, and in books. I am waiting for my body to become ready for sex so I can experience adulthood.*

I rode the school bus for 2 hours each weekday where sex and bodies were frequent topics. Since I was a slim child, I was repeatedly mocked for having a flat chest despite being prepubescent. Once my breasts began to form, Mean brother yelled "*preemie boobies!*" for all to hear.

I was devastatingly embarrassed and had to work up the nerve to ask my mother for a bra.

Mean brother and other boys in middle school let me know that I was getting fat around age 12. My mother also noticed, and told my best friend and her parents that I was "getting chunky" at one of our soccer games.

I held onto my mother's opinion of my body without saying anything until she judgmentally asked me if I was eating a second fudge round at age 13.

I became distraught and told her that I knew she said I was "getting chunky" a couple years ago.

My mom scoffed at my 12 year old friend for telling me something hurtful and then said:

"You need to let it go."

CHAPTER 8: SUICIDE

“NOURISH A COCK, BUT SACRIFICE IT NOT; FOR IT IS SACRED TO THE SUN AND MOON.”

PYTHAGORAS c. 400 B.C.

Although I had considered and planned it many times, my first suicide attempt occurred when I was 19 after an internet prospect told me his preferred type of girlfriend was “very skinny.”

We had chatted for a few months via MySpace and Facebook sharing humor and musical interests, but I wanted him to *want* me.

I chased a bottle of generic aspirin with cheap vodka and waited for lights out.

Whenever I pictured taking my life, I had this tiny suspicion that something divine would intervene. Maybe a simple little sun shimmer would shine just right and help me feel loved or happy.

To my dismay, I awoke disoriented and sad. It turns out the universe just lets you do it.

There was no new lease on life or relief that it didn't work. It just felt like another disappointing experience.

I cut short my study abroad experience and returned to the United States where I would try again a few years later, this time spending a night in the emergency room and 4 days in a mental institution.

During my stay, an inexpressive male psychiatrist asked me how a mother could attempt suicide and then misdiagnosed me with bipolar disorder. I was prescribed Geodon, an antipsychotic that put me instantly to sleep.

In spite of my inability to remain awake on the medication, I was sent off with a prescription for a month's supply. Doctor knows best, I suppose.

During my commute to my call center job, I fell asleep at every stoplight. It was chilly outside, so I lowered my windows in hopes that the cold air would slap me awake.

When I finally entered the building, my eyelids fell as soon as I sat in my cubicle chair. I knew I couldn't make it through my shift, so I dragged myself to my supervisor's cubicle and explained my predicament.

Then I drove home.

CHAPTER 9: 33

I carry with me a sensitive soul who loves unconditionally, cares deeply, and feels immensely.

It is also, unfortunately, extremely gullible.

I spent 22 years desperately jotting down every criticism, praise, and observation.

Once the list is long enough, I will be *enough*.

I scribbled along diligently until I realized my list was so long, I would need another lifetime just to *read* it - let alone put it into practice.

In year 33, that fucker **burned**.

A spontaneous awakening is nearly an orgasmic experience.

I was once again suicidal. I stood naked in my bathroom preparing a bath for me and my infant son.

As the water crashed into the bathtub, burning tears seeped from my eyes as I stared at my nude reflection in anguish.

"Why would I choose this?" was the ugly opinion whose voice was loudest in my brain.

Before I could even complete the thought, my visual perspective shifted and I saw my body through the eyes of the universe.

My eyes stared into the mirror, but my vision was that of a fly on the ceiling.

I am **beautiful**.

It was as if I were 6 years old again, admiring my eyebrows or face shape in the mirror.

Normal vision returned the moment I glanced over at my son. He was sitting naked on the floor, delighted to be splashing in a puddle of his own spit-up.

I laughed. I was me again.

I was awe stricken by the absolute power I held within my own core. My womb. Where life begins and is flushed away in a tidal wave of blood and membranes.

I marched triumphantly down the hallway with my son on my hip. I had never felt this kind of lucidity as an adult.

With each step I felt like a goddess. A mother. A warrior.

I represented all that was and all that could be.

I realized then that my period started.

I set my son on the bedroom floor and scurried back to the bathroom. The blood had easily soaked through my underwear.

I laughed. I removed the underwear and wiped my vagina with them. I stuffed them in to absorb as much blood as possible.

As I held them up in front of the mirror to inspect them, I admired the sort of grotesque beauty that they were.

Blush, satiny fabric with lace trim. Pure and elegant.

Creased from being crumpled and crammed into a crevice. Covered in crimson and brown smears.



CHAPTER 10: BLESS YOU

“YOU'RE A PURE SOUL... BUT YOU DIDN'T SAY ‘GOD BLESS YOU’ WHEN I SNEEZED!”

MATT DAMON, 1999

Bhuddists say life is suffering. I couldn't understand this before I turned 33.

Life is just suffering? Why would generations of people fight to preserve this?

Thirty-three showed me that this life is only one part of a whole.

All humans possess within them this resistance to the material that seems counterintuitive to our fleshy brains because it is spiritual in nature.

To deny that any spirit exists is to accept pointless suffering. Generations of Americans have been brought up this way and it has created emotionally unwell, medicated adults.

To become a spiritual being is to be curious about the present. Taking human form renders the spirit incapable of

expressing itself in the material world, so our bodies act as conduits when we validate the soul's need to be heard.

An uninhibited laugh is a sneeze of the soul. Many adults still hold these back despite the discomfort it causes.

The soul laughs unfetteredly and loves unquestionably, but seeks only genuineness. Illegitimate bonds are stifling and can cause explosive episodes in those deeply connected with the true self.

Words are paradoxical communication aids that produce confoundedness more often than comprehension.

It is beautiful irony that my efforts to master lexicons have only shown how little my mind is able to grasp and how much further I have drifted from being understood in day-to-day interactions.

I struggle with verbal communication; there is so much involved:

Eye contact

Monitoring the listener's expressions and behaviors for understanding and interest

Matching tone to intent

Selecting vocabulary most likely to be in the listener's vernacular

Maintaining tact and respect in word choice and delivery

Practicing succinctness

Blank pages allow my words to exist in a space that is more temporary and flexible than the open air. I can clack the letters out carelessly knowing that at any point I can erase or change them. Heaps of times. Loads of times. You'll never know.

I can meticulously try on every adjective and consolidate sentences into neatly wrapped packages. Seconds, hours, or weeks... It is completely up to me how long I labor over each word.

But verbal communication doesn't have to be anxiety-riddled. There is neither an urgency to blurt out words nor a need to be flawlessly articulate.

Words are imperfect. We will never fully understand one another's minds.

Allowing ourselves and others the space to pause, ponder, and postulate promotes understanding, eases tension, and lets the **present** in.

It is only in the **present** that our souls shine.

For the true self, each intake of air has a brand new fragrance as its oxygen prepares for rebirth through the lips as carbon dioxide.

As such, the true self shines with a renewed brilliance through each and every audible stutter.

In my post-Catholicism home, nobody said anything when someone sneezed.

Today, I happily share bless you's without the fear of being associated with a wrathful man-God.

Bless you.