

*FROM NOWHERE TO  
HERE*

*BY  
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## **PROLOGUE**

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# PROLOGUE

## Prologue

### Mind Enclosure: The Framework

**The Basic Concept:** The mind operates like a house with multiple residents - distinct personalities that represent different aspects of yourself. These residents constantly discuss situations and make decisions together.

#### How It Works:

Each resident processes every situation through the same binary framework: *Results I want* vs. *Results I don't want*

Each resident defines these outcomes differently based on their core nature

One resident "speaks for the house" at any given time (your public face/dominant personality)

This dominance is determined by reinforcement - whichever traits you repeat most often become the leader

#### The Residents:

***The Child*** - Always asking "why" and "what if" and getting excited about new things. Probably bounces around a lot, gets distracted easily, wants to touch everything and see how it works. Gets hurt feelings when people are mean but bounces back fast. Probably leaves messes everywhere.

***The Protector*** - Always scanning for problems, interrupting conversations to point out dangers, the one who remembers to lock doors and check that the stove is off. Probably worries about money, weather, what other people think. Gets annoyed when others take risks.

***The Achiever*** - Makes lists, sets goals, gets impatient when things move too slowly. Probably measures everything, keeps track of progress, celebrates wins but immediately moves to the next challenge. Gets frustrated with the Child's distractions.

***The Moral Compass*** - Speaks up when things aren't fair, has strong opinions about right and wrong, gets genuinely upset when people are cruel or dishonest. Probably lectures the others sometimes about doing the right thing.

***The Strategist*** - Watches people to figure out what they really want, notices patterns, thinks three moves ahead. Probably comes up with clever solutions but sometimes overthinks simple problems. The others might find him a bit manipulative.

#### The Rules:

Every resident has a right to exist and be heard

You cannot eliminate residents, only choose who leads

Functional adaptation requires harmony between residents, not dominance by one

The conversations between residents are your thoughts

**The Goal:** Learn to orchestrate these internal voices so they work together toward the results you actually want, rather than against each other.

# EARLY JOURNEY

# CHAPTER 1: THE HOUSE AWAKES

# The House Awakes

Light coming through the window and it's making patterns on the wall like dancing shapes and oh look there's a shadow that looks like a dog no wait it's moving now it looks like a bird and I wonder if shadows dream about being the things they look like and—

Feet hitting the cold floor and whoa that's cold but also kind of fun the way it makes my toes scrunch up and why is the floor always colder in the morning than at night is it because the sun went away or because the floor gets lonely when nobody's walking on it and—

*But check the time first make sure it's actually morning and not some middle-of-the-night false alarm and why is the light so bright did someone break in*

The bathroom mirror shows my face all puffy and weird and I make funny faces at myself because morning face is so silly with hair sticking up like I got electrocuted and I wonder if other people's hair does this too or if it's just mine and what would happen if I never combed it would it just keep growing in crazy directions like a plant reaching for sun and—

*Six forty-seven AM three minutes before the alarm good we're not late but what if the clock is wrong what if we miscalculated*

Water from the tap making this sound like a tiny waterfall and I cup my hands to catch it and watch it spill through my fingers like liquid diamonds and why does water feel so different when it's moving versus when it's sitting still in a cup and I wonder where this water came from did it used to be in a cloud floating around and what did it see up there and—

*Water running clear not brown like that time that meant expensive plumber visit and every dollar matters when you're counting every dollar*

Toothbrush feels funny against my teeth all bristly and the toothpaste tastes like mint but not like the mint from leaves because I tried eating a mint leaf once and it was completely different like the difference between looking at a picture of an ocean and actually swimming in one and why do we put this stuff in our mouths just to rinse it out anyway and—

Getting dressed but this shirt has a spot on it from yesterday when I spilled coffee and now the spot looks like a tiny island on a blue ocean and I wonder what it would be like to live on that island would there be tiny people there and what would they eat maybe they'd fish in coffee puddles and—

*That spot means people will notice and judge and make assumptions about competence and first impressions matter especially when you're already different already foreign*

Oh wait I can feel the other residents stirring starting to wake up there's Achiever-T making mental lists and Strategic-T thinking about workplace dynamics and Conscience-T worrying about family but right now it's still mostly wonder time still notice-everything-time and—

Everything is new again like it always is in the morning like the world got reset while we were sleeping and now there are all these things to discover the taste of toothpaste and the feeling of water and the funny faces in the mirror and the way shadows move across the wall like they're telling stories and—

*Bus fare is exact change because using larger bills means getting change back and change can be dropped or lost*

I wonder what new things I'll notice today that I never noticed before because there are always new things if you pay attention like yesterday I noticed that the bus makes a different sound when it's empty versus when it's full like it's singing different songs depending on how many people are listening and—

*Weather looks like rain which means wet clothes and looking disheveled at work and wet shoes that squeak*

The house is waking up properly now and I can feel the other residents starting to take charge of the morning but for just a few more minutes it's still my time it's still why-and-what-if time and that's my favorite time because everything is possible in the morning before the grown-up residents start making decisions and plans and worries and—

*Check the stove is off check the lights are off check the door is locked twice because being robbed would end everything*

Oh look the light pattern changed again now it looks like a butterfly and I wonder if butterflies ever wish they were shadows so they could dance on walls instead of having to fly everywhere and—

*Seven fifteen seventeen minutes for commute buffer time built in for unexpected delays*

Because everything is possible in the morning before reality sets in.

*Every day survived is a victory but there are so many days left to survive*

Morning routine complete. The house is awake. All residents reporting for duty.



# CHAPTER 2:

# THE

# DECISION

## The Decision

Walking through Lagos airport and everything smells like diesel and sweat and excitement and I wonder what airports smell like in other countries do they all have this electric feeling in the air like everyone's about to become different people and look at that man with stickers from everywhere London Paris New York and I wonder what stories those stickers could tell and—

"You know I left my daughter's birthday party for this," Uncle Yinka says, shifting my suitcase to his other hand. His voice carries that familiar broadcaster tone even when he's trying to be casual.

"Uncle, you didn't have to—"

"She's one year old, Toye. She won't remember. But this?" He gestures toward the departure board. "This she'll hear about her whole life. How Uncle Yinka helped send cousin Toye to become a doctor in Canada."

*He's making this sound more important than it is what if I fail what if I disappoint everyone what if—*

*But look at all these people going to magical places and that departure board keeps changing like it's telling new stories every minute and—*

The woman at the check-in counter smiles when we approach. "Traveling to Toronto today?"

"Yes, ma'am. First time back," I say, then catch myself. "I mean, first time as an adult."

Her fingers pause over the keyboard. "Back?"

"I was born in Montreal. My father was at McGill University."

*Dad always said I'd return to Canada. He made sure I had the papers even though Mum tried to hide them tried to make me believe I'd lost my citizenship when—*

Uncle Yinka nudges me. "Show her the passport."

I hand over the crisp new Canadian passport, and she studies it carefully. Too carefully.

"This is quite new."

"I just got it from the High Commission. I'm a citizen by birth."

*Why is she looking at it like that? What's wrong with new passports?*

*Timeline optimal for career advancement. All documentation legally obtained. No violations detected.*

She stamps something and hands me boarding passes. "Gate 12. Have a safe flight."

We walk toward security, Uncle Yinka's famous face drawing nods and whispers. A woman stops him.

"Excuse me, aren't you—"

"Yes, ma'am. Thank you." He signs something quickly, then pulls me along. "Come on, nephew."

At security, the officer takes my passport and studies it for a long time. Too long.

"Where's your entry stamp?" he asks.

"My what?"

"Your entry stamp into Nigeria. This passport shows no entry."

*Oh no oh no this is bad this is very bad what if they don't let me leave what if—*

*Wait, explain the situation. Born here, lived here, just got new passport to replace—*

"Sir, I was born in Canada but I've lived in Nigeria my whole life. This is a replacement passport."

"You lived here illegally then. No Nigerian passport, no entry stamp." His voice gets harder.  
"You're an illegal alien."

*This is exactly what Mum was afraid of this is why she hid the papers tried to protect me from—*

*But that makes no sense! Born Canadian, lived in Nigeria legally, what kind of logic—*

*Crisis management required. Explain family situation, father's scholarship, legitimate residence status.*

Uncle Yinka steps forward. "Officer, perhaps we can—"

"Sir, please step back."

The security chief appears, drawn by the commotion. He's a big man with tired eyes who starts to say something official until he sees Uncle Yinka.

"Wait... aren't you the voice of Lagos Football? The Cup final last month?"

Uncle Yinka's broadcaster smile appears. "Yes, sir. This is my nephew. He's traveling for medical residency."

*This is surreal. I'm about to be arrested and Uncle's getting recognized for sports commentary.*

*But maybe this helps maybe celebrity status creates alternative solutions maybe—*

"Medical residency? In Canada?" The chief's whole demeanor changes. "Outstanding! We need more Nigerian doctors trained internationally."

He studies my passport again, but differently now. "Born Montreal, eh? Your father was a student?"

"Commonwealth scholarship at McGill University."

"Smart man. And you maintained citizenship properly through the High Commission?"

"Yes, sir."

*Please let this work please let Uncle's fame mean something please let—*

He stamps something aggressively and hands back my passport. "Safe travels, doctor. Make us proud."

Uncle Yinka and I walk toward the gate in stunned silence.

"Your mother's going to kill me if she finds out about that," he finally says.

"She already tried to kill my dreams by hiding my papers."

"She loves you, Toye. Losing your father... she couldn't bear losing you too."

*But her fear almost destroyed everything almost kept me from Dad's dream of me returning to Canada.*

*Though maybe she knew something about the complications maybe she was protecting me from exactly what just happened.*

We reach the gate where other passengers are already boarding. Uncle Yinka stares at the Lufthansa plane through the window.

"October 17th, 1987," he says quietly. "I'll remember this date forever."

"Why?"

"Because this is when my nephew became brave enough to honor his father's dreams."

House meeting time. All residents weighing in:

Child-me: *But what if Canadian airports smell different and what new things will I discover and what if Mum was right to be scared and—*

Protector-me: *Just survived major security crisis. Risk assessment shows continued vulnerability to bureaucratic complications.*

Achiever-me: *Obstacles overcome. Timeline maintained. Target objective: establish medical career, prove Mum's fears wrong.*

Moral Compass-me: *Dad said use your gifts to serve people. Are there not people in Canada who need healing? But Mum's heart was trying to protect too.*

Strategist-me: *Uncle Yinka's celebrity status provides unexpected resource advantages. File this information for future navigation.*

"Final boarding call for Lufthansa Flight 441 to Frankfurt, connecting to Toronto."

Uncle Yinka hugs me hard. "Tell your father I kept my promise. I got you on that plane."

*And maybe he knows something about fathers and sons and promises that survive even death.*

The departure gate is calling and this is it this is the moment when maybe becomes definitely when dreams become geography when everything changes forever and—

All residents reaching consensus: terrified but determined. This is what honoring the dead looks like while trying not to destroy the living.

"Give your daughter my love. Tell her cousin Toye owes her a birthday present from Canada."

"I'll tell her you're going to save lives."

But we both know I might be the one who needs saving.

Everything else is just stepping forward.

Into Dad's dream. Away from Mum's fear. Toward whatever waits in the country where I was born but never really lived.

# CHAPTER 3:

# LANDING

## Landing

The airplane door opens and this cold air rushes in like nothing I've ever felt before like the air itself is alive and angry and it makes my nose hurt and my eyes water and I wonder if this is what winter tastes like if cold has flavor and everyone around me is putting on big puffy coats like they're getting ready for battle against the weather and—

*This is too much everything is too much too bright too cold too fast too different*

*But look at how shiny everything is and how the lights make patterns and maybe this is what efficiency looks like maybe—*

The airport smells different not like diesel and sweat but like something clean and chemical and artificial like someone cleaned the world with soap and the sounds are different too no honking no shouting no music just this quiet hum like a giant machine breathing and—

*What if I make a mistake what if I say the wrong thing what if I don't understand what people are asking*

The floor is so shiny I can see my reflection walking underneath me like there's another me living in a mirror world and I wonder who cleans all this and how they keep it so perfect and the people move differently here like they're all in a hurry but also like they know exactly where they're going and—

*Timeline assessment: arrived on schedule, documentation prepared, next objective immigration clearance*

Their faces look closed like doors that don't want visitors and when I smile at people they look away quickly like smiling might be against some law I don't know about and—

The immigration line moves slowly and my heart pounds as I approach the booth. The officer is a middle-aged man with kind eyes who takes my passport and studies it carefully.

"Born in Montreal," he says, looking up at me.

"Yes, sir. My father was a student at McGill University."

He flips through the pages, then looks at me again. "How long have you been away?"

"My whole life, sir. I was just a baby when we left."

*What if he finds something wrong what if they decide I can't stay what if—*

His face softens and he stamps my passport with a firm thud. "Welcome home, sir. You've been gone for a long time, and it's good to see you come back."

*Home. He called this place home. Like I belong here like I've always belonged here.*

*But what if it doesn't feel like home what if home is something you have to earn not something you're born into and—*

*Emotional response detected: immigration officer's kindness unexpected. Positive social interaction recorded.*

The words hit me like warm water and I feel tears starting because nobody has ever called Canada home for me before and maybe that's what I needed to hear maybe that's what Dad would have wanted someone to tell me and—

"Thank you, sir. Thank you so much."

I walk toward baggage claim feeling lighter than I have since leaving Lagos, looking for the uncle of my girlfriend who's supposed to meet me. I have his picture in my wallet and he has mine but—

*What if he doesn't come what if he forgot what if I'm stranded in an airport where everything costs more than I can afford*

*But the immigration officer said welcome home so maybe this will work out maybe—*

The baggage carousel makes this mechanical sound and the signs say "deplaning" and "baggage carousel" and why don't they just say getting off the plane and where the suitcases come from and I wait and wait watching people reunite with families and friends and—

*He's not here. Something went wrong. Classic logistical failure and now what do I do?*

*Maybe he's just late maybe he's coming maybe I should wait longer and look around more and—*

My suitcase finally appears and I grab it and stand in the arrivals area holding his picture, looking for a face that matches. People stream past me with purpose and direction while I stand there like a lost tourist and—

After an hour, I find a payphone and dig out the phone number he gave me. The phone rings and rings.

"Hello?"

"This is Toye, from Nigeria. I just landed and I'm at the airport."

Long pause. "Oh no! Toye! I went to the airport! I was there for hours!"

"I'm here now. At Terminal 2."



"I had the wrong flight number! I thought you were coming on British Airways! I waited and waited and then left!"

*Of course. Of course something went wrong. Why would anything be simple?*

*But he sounds genuinely sorry and he's willing to come back so maybe—*

*Crisis management required: alternative transportation options, backup accommodation strategies*

"Can you come back?"

"Of course! Stay right there! I'll be there in forty-five minutes!"

I sit on a bench surrounded by all this gleaming efficiency while knowing that back home Uncle Yinka is probably wondering if I made it safely and the contrast hits me between this place that represents everything Nigeria could be if systems worked and—

*The cold is seeping through the windows and I didn't know cold could hurt like this*

When he finally arrives, he's a small man with a warm smile who looks exactly like his picture except older and more tired.

"Toye! My boy! Look at you!" He grabs my hands. "I'm so sorry about the mix-up. These airlines, they change everything."

"It's okay. Thank you for coming back."

"Come, come. My car is outside."

*He seems genuinely kind but something feels different from what I expected maybe—*

*Transportation secured. Next objective: temporary accommodation assessment.*

*But look at his car it's older than expected and his coat looks worn and maybe the stories about success in Canada were—*

As we drive through Toronto, he points out landmarks with enthusiasm, but I notice we're heading toward areas that don't look prosperous, don't look like the success stories he used to tell when he visited Nigeria.

"Here we are!" He pulls up to a run-down apartment building. "Home sweet home."

*This is not what I expected not what the stories suggested about his entrepreneurial success*

*But he's being kind and offering shelter and maybe appearances don't matter if the heart is good and—*

The apartment is tiny, smaller than our room back home, and there's just a couch and a small TV and the kitchen is the size of a closet.

"You can sleep on the couch," he says, apologizing. "It's not much, but it's warm."

*One bedroom welfare flat. The entrepreneurial success was an illusion was pride was the story immigrants tell to make families proud and—*

*But he's sharing what he has and that matters more than the size of the space and—*

*Accommodation secured: basic but functional. Host appears genuine despite economic misrepresentation.*

"Tomorrow I'll show you how things work here. The welfare office, the system. How to get started."

*Welfare. Not business opportunities, not entrepreneurial ventures. The reality of immigrant life in Canada.*

*But maybe this is also part of the journey maybe understanding the system from the bottom up is important and—*

House meeting time. All residents processing:

Child-me: *Everything looks so different and the cold feels like a new language and maybe tomorrow will bring new discoveries even if they're not what I expected and—*

Protector-me: *Accommodation basic but secure. Host trustworthy despite economic exaggeration. Welfare system represents safety net.*

Achiever-me: *Reality adjustment required: success timeline may be longer than anticipated. Information gathering phase initiated.*

Moral Compass-me: *This man is sharing what little he has. Dad would say that's the true measure of character, not the size of someone's apartment.*

Strategist-me: *Initial intelligence was inaccurate but not maliciously so. Host appears to be managing similar immigrant challenges. Potential learning opportunity.*

Maybe this is what metamorphosis really looks like maybe this is how butterflies feel when they first try their wings uncertain whether they'll fly or fall but knowing they can't go back to being caterpillars and—

The immigration officer said welcome home and maybe home isn't about the size of the apartment or the success stories people tell maybe it's about the kindness of strangers who drive back to airports and share their couches with people they've never met and—

Time to find out what happens next.

Time to discover what kind of adventure begins with cold air and welfare offices and the gap between immigrant dreams and immigrant reality.

But also with the kind of generosity that makes strangers feel like family, even in a one-bedroom flat.

# CHAPTER 4:

# FIRST

# CONTACT

## First Contact

Walking into the security station and there's this older man with gray hair sitting at the desk and he looks up when I come in and for just a second I think he might smile but then his face changes like when you see something you don't like and---

*Danger signals immediately this man doesn't like us his face his body language everything says threat*

I don't understand what I did wrong because I just walked in and said good morning but maybe I said it wrong or maybe I'm standing in the wrong place and why does his face look like that like I'm something bad that wandered in from outside and---

"Good morning Peter, I'm Toye, starting today on the security team."

*Watch how he responds watch his body language watch for signs of trouble*

For just a moment his face goes neutral like he's putting on a mask and I try smiling bigger because sometimes when people look upset a smile helps but that makes his expression even more strange and now I'm really confused because aren't we supposed to work together and be friendly and---

He offers his hand for a handshake which seems normal seems professional and I reach out grateful that maybe I was wrong maybe he's just having a bad morning but then---

*Something's wrong about this handshake too quick too brief like he doesn't want to touch us*

And then he reaches for something white in his pocket and pulls out this handkerchief and starts wiping his hands and I wonder what that's about does he have allergies or maybe his hands were dirty but---

*He's wiping his hands after touching us like we're contaminated like we're dirty*

The way he does it is so deliberate so visible making sure I see making sure I understand and now I'm not confused anymore now I know exactly what this means and my stomach drops because---

*This is bad this is very bad because what if he has influence what if people listen to him*

But wait maybe he's just being funny maybe this is Canadian humor that I don't understand yet and I notice the Bible on his desk and that cross pendant around his neck and religious people are good people right religious people don't hate strangers for no reason and---

*Maybe we're misreading this maybe we're being too sensitive*

*But no the handkerchief was deliberate was a message was meant to hurt*

*Timeline assessment: first day impressions critical for long-term employment success*

Over the next few weeks I start to understand Peter's system and it's clever and it's careful and it's designed to never leave evidence because he only says things when we're alone when there are no witnesses and---

When other guards are around he's polite professional even friendly sometimes and I wonder if I imagined the handkerchief incident until he does it again and again always when nobody else can see and---

*What if he tells lies about us what if he turns everyone against us before we even have a chance*

*But he's so religious surely he knows right from wrong surely his faith means something*

One day when it's just us he says something about how people like me should be grateful for jobs like this and the way he says "people like me" makes my skin crawl but when I look confused he laughs and says he's just joking and---

*This is not joking this is something else entirely*

*But what if we complain and nobody believes us what if they say we're making trouble*

*Assessment: hostile work environment but employment critical for survival*

Mum's voice in my head saying be careful don't make trouble and maybe she was right because she understood how to navigate difficult people how to survive when you're vulnerable and---

*We don't know the rules here don't know what's allowed what's not don't know who to trust*

Then there's Mike this young guard who seems different seems kinder and one day he's walking toward the vending machine and asks if I want a pop and I say yes please and thank you so much when he hands it to me and---

*Finally someone being genuinely nice someone treating us like a human being*

*But watch for hidden costs watch for expectations*

Mike just walks away doesn't say anything else and I feel grateful because finally someone is showing simple kindness simple friendship and maybe not everyone here is like Peter and---

*Positive social interaction detected. Potential ally identified.*

*But why didn't he want money? In Nigeria you always offer to pay when someone gets you something*

A week later another guard comes up to me shaking his head looking disgusted and calls me a "cheap skate" and I'm so confused because what did I do wrong and---

"What do you mean? Why are you insulting me?"

"Mike told us you took his pop without paying! Just grabbed it and walked away!"

*Oh no oh no this is terrible this is exactly what we were afraid of*

My stomach drops and I feel sick because in Nigeria if someone offers to get you a drink and you try to give them money it's a huge insult because you're saying they're too poor to buy you a drink you're questioning their generosity their ability to provide and---

*Cultural miscommunication massive failure we violated unwritten rules*

*But Mike seemed so nice why didn't he just tell us he expected payment why tell everyone else instead*

*Crisis management required: reputation damage control immediate payment necessary*

I run to find Mike feeling horrible feeling like I've committed some terrible crime against friendship and when I find him I apologize over and over and pull out money to pay him and---

"Mike I'm so sorry I didn't know I thought you were being kind I didn't understand the system here please take this money please---"

He takes the money without saying much and I realize I've learned something important about this place about how Canadians might not tell you directly when you've upset them but they'll certainly tell everyone else and---

*Note for survival: always clarify payment expectations even for small gestures*

*But how many other unwritten rules are there that we don't know about*

House meeting time. All residents processing this new information:

Child-me: *Everything has different rules here and people smile but mean different things and how do you learn what's safe when kindness might be business and---*

Protector-me: *Multiple threats identified: Peter's deliberate hostility, Mike's indirect communication, unknown cultural expectations everywhere.*

Achiever-me: *Learning curve steeper than anticipated. Cultural adaptation protocols required. Employment stability dependent on social navigation skills.*

Moral Compass-me: *Mum said treat people with respect but what happens when respect means different things to different people? What would Mum say about Peter's handkerchief? Dad dreamed of me succeeding here, but Mum taught me how to survive difficult people.*

Strategist-me: *Pattern emerging: direct confrontation inadvisable due to employment vulnerability. Observation and adaptation required. Peter targets isolation, Mike represents communication style differences.*

Maybe this is what immigration really means maybe it's not just changing countries but learning that everything you thought you knew about human interaction might be wrong and---

*We need this job but we also need to figure out how to survive it*

Peter continues his careful campaign of making me feel unwelcome always when nobody else can see and I continue pretending I don't understand because what else can I do and---

*And we still don't know our rights don't know if this behavior is normal or illegal don't know who would listen if we complained*

The handkerchief comes out again and again after every handshake every interaction and I start to understand that this is his signature this is how he maintains his superiority while maintaining his plausible deniability and---

*What if this is just how Canada works what if this is normal and we're the problem*

*But the Bible on his desk mocks everything he does with that handkerchief*

Maybe survival here means learning that some people use religion like a costume and some people use politeness like a weapon and some people use silence like a trap and---

Time to figure out which battles to fight and which ones to endure.

Time to learn that standing up for yourself might be a luxury you can't afford when rent is due and family is counting on money from a job that could disappear.

But also time to learn that not all cultural misunderstandings are malicious and sometimes people just have different ways of showing upset and maybe Mike isn't an enemy just someone who speaks a different emotional language and---

Welcome to the complicated mathematics of immigrant survival.

Welcome to discovering that adaptation might be more about learning new rules than changing who you are.



# CHAPTER 5:

# THE WINDOW

## The Window

The bus is rocking back and forth like a big metal cradle and I'm trying to read this newspaper someone left behind but the words keep moving with the motion and everyone around me is talking with these voices that go up at the end of sentences like they're asking questions even when they're not and I wonder why Canadians always sound like they're unsure about everything they're saying and---

*Their accent is so strange so different from what I expected*

There's this man across from me with gray hair and he clears his throat like he wants to say something and I look up and smile because that's what you do when someone wants to talk and his voice does that same thing that lifting sound like everything's a question and---

"Do you want to close the window please?"

I think about it really think about it because he's asking what I want and I look at the window that's cracked open just a little bit and the air feels okay not too cold not too hot even though I'm wearing my winter jacket and gloves and ear muffs because October in Canada means winter right and---

*He asked what we want so answer honestly*

"No" because honestly I don't particularly want to close the window and---

*Danger alarm ringing in my head because I've made someone angry and I don't even know why*

His face changes like I said something terrible like I kicked his dog or stole his lunch money and I don't understand what happened because he asked what I wanted and I told him what I wanted and isn't that how conversations are supposed to work but---

The woman next to him makes this sound like she's choking and whispers something urgent and I catch fragments of their conversation and realize they're talking about me and suddenly I'm aware of how I must look bundled up in full winter gear while people around me are wearing shorts and t-shirts and---

*This is exactly the kind of thing that marks you as different as foreign as someone who doesn't belong*

"He wants you to close the window."

*The damage is done the impression is made and I'm marked now as someone who needs translation*

The woman's whispered explanation makes my stomach drop because now I understand I failed some test I didn't know I was taking and sitting here looking like I'm preparing for an arctic expedition while everyone else looks comfortable in summer clothes and---

*What if this kind of mistake follows me what if people remember the foreign guy who can't understand simple requests*

Wait, so "Do you want to" actually means "Please do" regardless of what I actually want? That's like asking if I want coffee when you mean bring you coffee.

*And we're the one who looks out of place who sounds different who doesn't understand the codes*

A moment later someone behind me asks "Where are you from?" and there it is that question that seems to follow me everywhere and I turn around to see a curious face and---

"Nigeria originally, but I was born in Canada."

"Oh, that explains the accent!"

*Accent? What accent? They're the ones with the funny way of talking*

But suddenly I'm hearing my own voice differently and maybe it's not that they have strange accents maybe it's that I'm the one who sounds different and this is another one of those perspective shifts that hits you like cold water and---

*Assessment: we are the anomaly we are the variable that doesn't fit*

The frustration burns because why can't people just say what they mean why wrap a simple request in the language of choice when choice isn't actually being offered and this feels like everything wrong with polite society where nothing is direct where everything is coded and---

*How many other tests am I failing every day how many other ways am I announcing I don't belong*

I reach up quickly to close the window hoping to fix it hoping to show I understand now but his face is still cold still angry and everyone's looking at me like I broke some invisible rule and I'm sitting here sweating in my winter jacket while they're comfortable in their light clothes and---

*What if word gets around somehow what if this affects my ability to get jobs*

The pattern starts to become clear and maybe it's not that everyone else is strange maybe it's that I'm the one who stands out who dresses wrong who talks wrong who responds wrong to simple social cues and---

*October means different things here than I thought it means*

Here I was thinking these Canadians had funny accents ending everything on a high note like they're always asking questions even when they're making statements and slowly it dawns on me that maybe they all sound the same to each other maybe I'm the one with the accent maybe I'm the one whose voice marks him as foreign and---

*Reality shift: we are not observing difference we are the difference*

The bus keeps rocking and more people get on and I watch how they dress how they talk how they respond to each other and slowly I start to see the patterns I've been missing the codes I don't understand the ways I stand out without even trying and---

"Where are you from?" comes again from someone new who just boarded and I realize this question is going to follow me everywhere because something about me signals different signals foreign signals not from here and---

*Multiple data points confirming: we are immediately identifiable as outsider*

Maybe it's the way I bundled up for October weather like I was heading to the North Pole while everyone else treats it like extended summer or maybe it's how I speak or how I move or how I respond to simple requests but whatever it is everyone can see it immediately and---

*Failed some test I didn't know I was taking and now everyone knows I failed*

House meeting time. All residents processing this revelation:

Child-me: *But I thought they were the ones who sounded funny and dressed light for cold weather and now everyone's looking at me like I'm the strange one and---*

Protector-me: *Identity compromise detected. We are highly visible as different. This increases vulnerability in all social and professional situations.*

Achiever-me: *Learning curve steeper than anticipated. Cultural camouflage skills required. Observation and adaptation protocols must be refined.*

Moral Compass-me: *Mum always said pay attention to how people treat you because it tells you who they are, but maybe it also tells you who they think you are.*

Strategist-me: *Pattern analysis reveals: clothing choices, speech patterns, and social responses all signal outsider status. Modification strategies required.*

Maybe this is what cultural adaptation really means not just learning new rules but accepting that you are the variable that needs to change that you are the one who must adapt while everyone else gets to stay exactly as they are and---

*And we thought we were just observing Canadian culture but we are the disruption in their cultural system*

The window is closed now. The man looks slightly less angry but still watchful. I'm sweating in my winter jacket while he's comfortable in his light sweater and somewhere in this moment I realize that belonging isn't just about learning the rules it's about becoming invisible about blending in so well that nobody thinks to ask where you're from and---

*What other simple things will I get wrong what other ways will I announce that I don't belong here*

Maybe tomorrow I'll understand one more rule maybe I'll dress more appropriately for the actual weather instead of the weather I imagined and maybe eventually I'll speak in a way that doesn't immediately mark me as different and---

*Every interaction is a learning opportunity and a potential failure*

The bus keeps rocking and I keep learning that adaptation means accepting that you are the problem that needs solving that you are the equation that doesn't balance and everyone else gets to stay exactly as they are.

Maybe the window was never about the window.

Maybe it was about learning that I'm the one who needs adjusting.

# **CRISIS MOMENTS**

# CHAPTER 6:

## COTTON-

## PICKING

## Cotton Picking

The radio keeps crackling and spitting static and it's driving everyone crazy so I offer to take a look because back home I fixed radios all the time and maybe this one just needs the antenna adjusted or the tuning cleaned and the dials feel familiar under my fingers like old friends and---

*Peter's watching me work and I can feel his eyes on my hands like heat*

I'm almost getting it working getting the voices to come through clear when Peter walks over and he's got that look on his face that serious look he gets sometimes and we're alone in this part of the building everyone else is outside on break and---

"Take your cotton-picking hands off that radio."

The words hit like ice water like a slap that doesn't leave marks and I freeze with my hands still on the dials because did he really just say that did he really just use those words and I know what cotton-picking means I know it's about slavery about my ancestors about treating people like property and my hands start shaking and---

*Wait did he really just say that or did I imagine it because we're alone and no one else heard*

His face looks satisfied like he's won something like he's proven something important and he's wiping his hands with that white handkerchief again like he always does after touching anything I've touched and I want to say something want to respond but my voice feels stuck and---

*What if I misunderstood what if it means something different here what if I'm being too sensitive*

I step back from the radio and Peter just walks away like nothing happened like those words weren't violence like racism isn't real and he sits down with his Bible and starts reading like he's the most righteous person in the building and the hypocrisy burns like acid because---

*But what if he reports me for touching company equipment what if this was a trap what if I walked into something*

Later when everyone comes back from break I'm still standing there still trying to process what just happened and I notice them all laughing about something and Peter's in the middle telling some story with hand gestures and animated face and---

*What if this becomes normal what if everyone starts treating me this way what if winter comes and I have no job*

I catch fragments of what he's saying and my stomach drops because he's telling them about the radio about my "cotton-picking hands" and they're all laughing and nodding like it's the funniest thing they've ever heard and some of them are looking over at me and---

*They all knew they all heard him joking about it and nobody said anything nobody defended me*



The isolation hits like a wave because it wasn't just Peter it was all of them they all think it's acceptable to mock me to reduce me to stereotypes to treat me like I'm less than human and I wonder how long this has been going on how many jokes I haven't heard and the loneliness feels like drowning and---

*What if I complain and they all say it never happened what if they protect each other what if I'm the problem*

*Performance assessment: hostile work environment escalating, need immediate response strategy to prevent normalization of racist behavior*

*Mom always taught me to stand up for what's right to never let anyone treat me as less than equal but Mom never had to choose between dignity and survival*

*Strategic analysis required: Peter's religious identity may provide leverage point for behavioral modification through cognitive dissonance creation*

House meeting time. All residents in crisis mode:

*Child-me: But I was just trying to help fix the crackling radio and Peter's face looked so mean and satisfied and everyone thinks it's funny that he said those terrible words about my hands and I don't understand why people have to be so cruel when I was just trying to make the music clear and---*

*Protector-me: Danger escalation confirmed. Racist language in front of witnesses means they're testing boundaries. What if this spreads? What if the supervisor hears and sides with them? What if reporting this makes us a target? What if staying silent teaches them this behavior is acceptable?*

*Achiever-me: Workplace harassment documented. Need strategic response that maintains employment security while establishing boundaries. Timeline critical - must respond before behavior normalizes. Success metrics: reduction in hostile incidents, improved workplace respect.*

*Moral Compass-me: Mom said never let anyone make you feel small, never accept treatment that degrades your dignity. This is exactly what she warned me about - people who use their power to hurt others. Standing up for what's right isn't optional, it's necessary.*

*Strategist-me: Peter's religious identity analysis complete. Extensive Bible reading, church references, salvation certainty creates exploitable contradiction with racist behavior. Strategic approach: challenge through faith-based questioning about divine appearance and heavenly demographics.*

The plan forms like pieces of a puzzle clicking together and maybe there's a way to use Peter's own beliefs against his behavior maybe there's a question that could plant itself in his mind like a splinter that won't go away and---

*What if there's a way to make him confront the contradictions between his claimed faith and his demonstrated hatred*

Because if Peter really believes in God really believes in love really believes in redemption then maybe he needs someone to ask the questions that force him to examine whether his assumptions about heaven align with his assumptions about race and---

*Strategic implementation: casual religious discussion leading to targeted questioning about God's appearance*

Maybe tomorrow I'll find a way to ask Peter about his God about his heaven about whether he's ever wondered what the Divine actually looks like and whether his assumptions might be limiting his understanding of who gets saved and---

*This could backfire could make everything worse but doing nothing means accepting this treatment forever*

Maybe it's time to find out what happens when you make someone really think about who they're worshipping and whether their God would recognize them.

*Time to plant the seed that changes everything.*

# CHAPTER 7:

# SANCTUARY

## Sanctuary

The key feels heavy in my hand and I wonder why keys always feel heavier when you're tired and the door opens to my small room that smells like the soap I used to wash my clothes this morning and the familiar scent should be comforting but today nothing feels safe and---

*Safe inside with the door locked but the fear doesn't stay outside the fear follows me home*

There's still sunlight coming through the window making that same pattern on the wall and I wonder if the light missed me while I was gone and today was hard because Peter said those terrible words about cotton-picking hands and I thought we were alone but then I discovered everyone heard him joking about it and---

*What if Peter escalates what if he finds more public ways to humiliate me what if today was just the beginning*

The memory keeps replaying Peter's satisfied face when he said those words the way he wiped his hands with that handkerchief the way he sat down with his Bible like nothing happened and then later hearing him tell the story to everyone and watching them all laugh and---

*The supervisor saw their reaction and did nothing which means either he agrees or he's too weak to stop it*

Look there's a spider in the corner of the ceiling and I wonder if she's lonely too and if she knows that some people are afraid of spiders but she's just trying to live her life and catch flies and make her web in a place that doesn't necessarily welcome her and---

*What if other workers start treating me the same way what if this becomes normal what if they all think I'm fair game now*

The shame burns not shame for who I am but shame for staying silent for letting those words hang in the air unchallenged for failing to defend my own dignity and standing there frozen like a statue while he walked away victorious and---

*Rent is due soon and I counted the money three times and it's enough but barely and losing this job means losing everything*

Maybe we're both just trying to make our webs in places that don't always want us and I take off my shoes and my feet feel better and I wonder what Mom is doing right now and if she knows that some days are diamonds and some days are rocks and today was definitely a rock but---

*What if something goes wrong what if the heating breaks what if I get sick and can't work*

Dad's voice echoes you must stand up for yourself boy but Dad never had to choose between standing up and feeding family never had to weigh principle against survival and how do you honor both obligations without destroying everything you've worked for and---

*Family is counting on money I send and what if I can't send it what if they think I'm failing what if this is just the beginning*

The isolation feels complete now because it's not just Peter it's all of them they all think it's acceptable to mock me to reduce me to stereotypes and I wonder how many other jokes I haven't heard how many other ways they've been laughing behind my back and---

*Maybe I should start looking for another job but other jobs might have other Peters and starting over means probationary periods means proving myself again*

How do you calculate the mathematics of dignity how do you measure self-respect against rent money against family obligations and maybe there's a way to respond that maintains integrity without destroying security and---

*Winter is coming and being unemployed in winter means cold means hunger means failure*

*Strategic assessment required: Peter's religious identity provides optimal intervention point through cognitive dissonance creation*

*What if this is just how it is what if this is the price of being here what if I'm supposed to just accept this treatment*

House meeting time. All residents processing today's trauma:

Child-me: *But I was just trying to help fix the radio and Peter's words hurt so much and then everyone was laughing and pointing and I felt so small so alone and why do people have to be so mean when all I want is to belong and work together and make things better and---*

Protector-me: *Threat level critical. Group dynamics show coordinated hostility. What if this spreads beyond workplace? What if landlord hears? What if this affects other opportunities? Need defensive strategies but also offensive capabilities. Can't just endure indefinitely.*

Achiever-me: *Workplace harassment escalation documented. Current position salvageable through strategic intervention. Timeline accelerated - must establish boundaries before behavior normalizes. Success probability depends on tactical approach selection.*

Moral Compass-me: *Mom said never let anyone make you feel less than what God made you. This is exactly the kind of evil that good people must stand against. But also Mom never had to choose between principle and survival. Need wisdom to honor both teachings.*

Strategist-me: *Peter's religious framework creates exploitable vulnerability. Bible reading, church attendance, salvation certainty conflicts with racist behavior. Implementation strategy: neutral religious discussion leading to targeted questioning about divine appearance and heavenly demographics.*

Tomorrow I have to face Peter again and tomorrow I need to be better than I was today need to find the path between compromise and surrender between survival and self-respect and maybe there's an approach that honors both the man Dad raised and the responsibility I carry for others and---

*But the fear sits in my chest like a heavy stone and what if I'm not strong enough for this*

Tonight I need to pray for wisdom for guidance for strength and maybe there's an approach that uses Peter's own beliefs against his behavior maybe there's a question that could plant itself in his mind like a splinter that won't go away and---

*Risk mitigation through documentation while maintaining plausible deniability*

Maybe tomorrow will be the day I plant the seed that changes everything maybe tomorrow I'll find the courage to ask Peter about his God about his heaven about whether he's ever wondered what the Divine actually looks like and---

*Implementation timeline: immediate action required while incident remains fresh in memory*

That spider keeps building her web even though this corner isn't the safest place and maybe that's what survival looks like maybe it's about finding your space and defending it quietly and strategically and---

*Maybe tomorrow I'll be ready to ask Peter about what God looks like*

Maybe tomorrow will be different. Maybe tomorrow I'll discover what happens when you use someone's faith to challenge their hatred.

Maybe tomorrow I'll find out if redemption is possible or if some people are just determined to stay exactly as they are.

*Time to find out what kind of God Peter really believes in.*

# CHAPTER 8: CONFRONTA TION

## The Confrontation

Peter's sitting at the break table with his Bible open and his reading glasses perched on his nose and I can see him moving his lips slightly as he reads like he always does and my heart is pounding so hard I wonder if he can hear it and---

*This is it this is the moment we've been planning*

I walk over slowly trying to look casual trying to look like I'm just being friendly and not like I'm about to detonate a psychological bomb in his brain and he looks up when my shadow falls across his page and---

*What if he gets angry what if he reports me what if this backfires completely*

"Peter I see that deep down inside you are an honest God fearing man and truly believe that when you die, hopefully many years from now, you will be enthusiastically welcomed into the kingdom of heaven."

The words come out steadier than I expected and Peter's face changes completely like he wasn't expecting kindness especially not from me and his eyes get soft and a little misty and---

*He's touched he's genuinely moved by what I said*

"Thank you Toye that was very nice of you, I appreciate that very much."

His voice is gentle almost emotional and for a moment I see something different in him something vulnerable something human and I almost feel bad about what I'm about to do but then I remember cotton-picking hands and the laughter and---

*Now plant the seed now while his defenses are down*

"But I only really worry about one thing for you."

He leans forward slightly and there's genuine concern in his eyes like he actually cares what I think about his salvation and maybe that's the crack in his armor maybe that's where the light gets in and---

*Timing perfect target vulnerable proceed with psychological intervention*

"What is that Toye?"

*He's completely open completely trusting completely unprepared for what's coming*

"What are you going to do when you get to heaven and find out that God is black."



The words hang in the air like smoke like electricity like a question that can't be unasked and I watch his face change from concern to confusion to something that looks like physical pain and--

-

*Direct hit cognitive dissonance initiated target processing contradiction*

I turn away quickly without waiting for him to respond and walk back to my guard desk and my legs feel shaky and my heart is still pounding but I did it I actually did it I planted the seed that might change everything and---

*Mission accomplished now we wait to see if the seed grows*

Behind me I can hear nothing no response no movement no sound and I wonder if he's still sitting there frozen if he's still processing if his whole worldview is cracking apart like ice in spring and---

*What if he never speaks to me again what if this makes everything worse*

I sit down at my desk and pretend to review the security log but my hands are trembling slightly and I can't concentrate on the words because I keep thinking about his face about that moment when the question hit him like a slap and---

*Strategic psychological pressure successfully deployed through religious framework exactly as planned*

Part of me feels guilty for using his faith against him for turning his certainty into doubt but then I remember his satisfied face when he said cotton-picking hands and the way everyone laughed and---

*He needed to confront the contradictions between his beliefs and his behavior*

Ten minutes pass fifteen minutes pass and still no sound from the break room and I wonder what's happening in his head what arguments he's having with himself what assumptions he's questioning for the first time and---

*What if he goes to the supervisor what if he complains about harassment*

But also what if it works what if this question burrows into his brain and forces him to really think about the God he claims to worship and whether that God looks anything like what he's always imagined and---

*Implementation phase complete now monitoring for target response patterns*

When break time ends Peter walks past my desk without looking at me without saying anything and his face looks strange looks troubled looks like someone who's been asked a question he can't answer and---

*Processing time required for cognitive dissonance resolution*

The rest of the shift passes in silence and I wonder if I've made an enemy for life or if I've planted something that will grow into understanding into change into redemption and only time will tell which seed was planted and---

*Sometimes you have to break something before you can fix it*

Maybe that's what courage really looks like not the absence of fear but the willingness to act in spite of fear to plant seeds even when you don't know what will grow to ask questions that need asking even when the answers might be dangerous and---

*Mission status: initiated awaiting results*

Walking home I keep replaying the moment keep seeing his face keep wondering what happens next and whether tomorrow will bring anger or transformation or something else entirely and---

Maybe sometimes the most important conversations are the ones that start with a question someone's never been asked before.

Maybe sometimes the seeds that grow the tallest are the ones planted in the darkest soil.

Maybe Peter will spend tonight thinking about God's face for the first time in his life.

*Target analysis complete now we wait*

# CHAPTER 9: HANDSHAKE

## Handshake

Peter walks into the break room where I'm eating lunch and he looks different somehow smaller and his face has this expression I've never seen before like he's carrying something heavy and he sits down across from me without asking and---

*He's been avoiding me for three days since I asked him about God being black*

The way he won't quite meet my eyes and the way his hands fidget with his coffee cup tells me he's been wrestling with something heavy wrestling with the question I planted in his mind and--

-

*He says he's sorry but words are easy actions are hard and what if this is just damage control*

His voice is quiet when he speaks and he says "I've been thinking about what you said about heaven about God being black" and I can see his hands shaking a little and there's something defeated about the way he holds himself and---

*I want to believe him want to trust that people can change but this feels more like retreat than transformation*

He's not looking at me directly but kind of at the table and he continues "I couldn't stop thinking about it couldn't get it out of my head and I realized I never really thought about what God looks like I just assumed and that's wrong that's so wrong" and---

This is what I hoped for but also it feels hollow feels like someone saying what they think they're supposed to say rather than what they actually believe and---

*His tears look real but this feels more like being cornered than being converted*

His voice cracks a little and I can see moisture in his eyes and he says "I'm sorry I'm so sorry for the things I said for the way I treated you for making you feel unwelcome" but something about it feels rehearsed feels careful and---

*People don't really change that fast do they people don't really transform in three days*

When forced to confront the possibility that God might look different than he expected he's choosing the path of least resistance choosing to apologize rather than examine whether he actually believes what he's saying and---

*What if I forgive him and then he goes back to being the same person what if this is just performance*

"When you were just trying to work just trying to belong" and he finally looks at me and his eyes are red but there's something guarded there something that suggests this conversation is costing him something and---

*Strategic intervention partially successful but behavioral modification appears temporary surface-level compliance rather than belief change*

I want to feel good about this want to believe redemption is possible but this feels more like a beaten dog than a converted heart and the way he keeps glancing toward the door suggests he can't wait for this conversation to end and---

*Forgiveness feels complicated when you're not sure the person actually understands what they did wrong*

The apology he's offering feels incomplete feels like someone trying to make a problem go away rather than someone who's genuinely grappled with their own prejudice and what about all the jokes what about the laughter what about the handkerchief and---

*Maybe this is progress but it doesn't feel like victory it feels like damage control*

"I appreciate you saying that Peter" because what else do you say when someone apologizes even when you suspect they don't really mean it even when you know systemic racism doesn't get fixed by individual conversations and---

*I'm not ready to trust I'm not ready to forget I'm willing to accept this apology for what it is*

Peter nods and gets up quickly like he's completed an unpleasant task and walks away without suggesting we shake hands without proposing friendship without any of the reconciliation gestures you see in movies and---

*Mission partially accomplished hostile behavior may decrease but systemic problems remain unchanged*

Later I overhear Orin talking to Peter in low voices and I catch fragments about "troublemaker" and "stirring things up" and I realize that my psychological intervention may have created new problems may have painted me as someone who causes drama and---

*What if this makes everything worse what if now they see me as a threat to workplace harmony*

The conversation with Peter solved one problem but may have created bigger ones because Orin doesn't look like someone who appreciates employees who make other employees uncomfortable even when those employees deserve to be uncomfortable and---

*Individual change doesn't fix institutional racism and now I might be marked as a problem*

Maybe that's the real lesson maybe individual redemption is possible but rare and fragile and doesn't address the systems that created the problem in the first place and sometimes making one person think just makes everyone else defensive and---

Maybe Peter won't call me cotton-picking hands anymore. Maybe he'll just avoid me and complain to Orin about the foreign worker who asks uncomfortable questions about God.

Maybe that's not victory. Maybe that's just a different kind of problem.

*Sometimes winning one battle means losing the war*

Maybe tomorrow I'll find out what Orin thinks about employees who make other employees "uncomfortable" with religious discussions.

Maybe tomorrow I'll discover the difference between individual apologies and institutional protection.

# TURNING POINTS

# CHAPTER 10: THE SYSTEM



## The System

The supervisor's voice cuts through the morning air like cold metal and I'm standing there in my security uniform wondering why he's asking me to fold flyers for his garage sale when my job description clearly says security guard and---

*This is wrong this is not what we were hired for this is personal errands disguised as work*

"I'm sorry, but that's not part of my security duties."

The words come out before I can stop them and I watch his face change from casual authority to something harder something angrier and I realize I've just crossed some invisible line but folding flyers for someone's personal garage sale when you're hired for security work is completely inappropriate and---

*Danger signals everywhere but sometimes you have to stand up for basic dignity*

*But what if this costs us everything what if this is normal here*

*Assessment required: is this standard Canadian workplace practice or individual exploitation*

"Excuse me? Did you just refuse a direct order?"

"I was hired as a security guard not to fold flyers for personal garage sales."

*Mom always said know your worth know what's right but maybe Mom didn't understand how things work in Canada*

The conversation escalates quickly and suddenly I'm being told to clear out my locker and being escorted to the door and I'm thinking this can't be happening this can't be legal they can't fire someone for refusing to do work that's not in their job description and---

*We just lost our income and rent is due and nobody warned us this could happen*

*But surely refusing humiliating tasks outside your job description is a basic right*

*Timeline critical: need new employment immediately financial reserves minimal*

Walking out into the cold air carrying my few belongings in a plastic bag and the injustice burns in my chest because how is this legal how is this allowed and I don't understand how refusing to do personal errands for your supervisor can get you fired and---

*Maybe we don't understand anything about how this place works*

But finding another job should be easy right because I have Canadian work experience now and that's what everyone says you need is Canadian experience and I've got that now and---

*One job leads to another that's how it works right*

At home staring at job applications and I carefully write down my experience at the security company under "Previous Employment" and then I add my work at Burger King in Toronto because that shows I understand customer service and work ethic and---

*This should make us competitive show that we understand North American business*

McDonald's application form feels simple straightforward and when they ask about previous experience I proudly list both security work and Burger King and I think this is perfect this shows I can handle Canadian workplace demands and I understand the food service industry and--

*Two different types of experience showing adaptability and reliability*

The phone rings three days later and it's a manager from McDonald's and for a moment my heart lifts because this is it this is the callback that means employment that means rent money that means survival and---

"We reviewed your application and we won't be moving forward."

"Can I ask why? I have Canadian work experience and food service background."

Long pause. "Your experience at Burger King creates a conflict of interest."

*Conflict of interest? What conflict of interest we're talking about making hamburgers*

*But both companies make fast food how is that a conflict*

"I don't understand. How is previous food service experience a conflict?"

"McDonald's and Burger King are competitors. We can't hire someone with recent experience at a competing restaurant."

*Competitors? They're both just places that serve food to hungry people*

The phone goes dead and I sit there staring at the application wondering how food is competition wondering why helping people eat in one place prevents you from helping people eat in another place and---

*We don't understand the rules we don't understand the game being played*

*Every assumption we made about how things work was wrong*

*Critical error: listed competitive employment without understanding business relationships*

House meeting time. All residents in crisis mode:

Child-me: *But McDonald's and Burger King both just make food for hungry people and why can't someone who knows how to make food make food anywhere and this doesn't make sense and---*

Protector-me: *Every decision we make is wrong. Don't understand workplace rights, don't understand business competition, don't understand anything about survival here.*

Achiever-me: *Employment strategy failed. Canadian experience assumption incorrect. Competitive landscape analysis required before job applications.*

Moral Compass-me: *Mom said always do right by people but maybe doing right means different things here. Maybe standing up for dignity costs more than we can afford.*

Strategist-me: *Pattern emerging: operating without understanding fundamental system rules. Need framework for identifying what game is being played before attempting to play it.*

Days turn into weeks and the rejections pile up and each one teaches me something new about systems I don't understand about rules nobody explains about games where everyone knows the moves except me and---

*What if we never figure this out what if we're always one step behind*

*Money running out and rent due and nobody's calling back*

The apartment feels smaller each day and the silence gets louder and I'm starting to understand that being alone in a foreign country isn't just about missing home it's about not knowing how anything works and having nobody to ask and---

*This isolation is dangerous is making us vulnerable to every mistake*

*But we need a system we need a way to understand what's happening*

*Need to identify what game is being played before trying to play it*

Sitting at the small table with job applications spread around me and slowly something starts to form in my mind some way to make sense of this chaos some method for understanding systems before they destroy you and---

*First step: figure out what system you're in*

*Second step: learn the rules whether you agree or not*

*Third step: map out your choices under those rules*

*Fourth step: choose and move forward*

Maybe every situation is a game with rules and maybe the problem isn't that I'm bad at games maybe the problem is that I keep trying to play games without knowing which game is being played and---

*We need a framework for survival for understanding for making decisions when everything is unfamiliar*

The rent notice arrives and it's printed on official paper with official words about eviction and legal proceedings and I stare at it wondering how refusing to fold flyers for someone's garage sale led to losing my home and---

*But now we know the stakes now we understand what we're dealing with*

*System identification: survival in foreign workplace culture*

*Rule learning required immediately*

Maybe this is what rock bottom feels like when you realize you don't understand anything about how the world works and every assumption you had was wrong and you're completely alone with no safety net and no backup plan and---

*But also maybe this is when you stop making assumptions and start learning systems*

Time to figure out what game I'm actually playing.

Time to learn the rules before they destroy me.

Time to find out what choices I actually have instead of the choices I thought I had.

Time to choose survival over pride.

Time to understand that sometimes the system wins and you have to decide whether to adapt or disappear.

# CHAPTER 11: WAVES

## Waves

Sitting at my kitchen table staring at the eviction notice and the words keep swimming around and I can't make them stay still can't make them make sense and---

\*This is it this is the end we're going to be homeless on Canadian streets\*

\*Assessment required immediate action needed but no viable options present financial reserves depleted\*

\*Mom always said things work out but what if this time they don't what if this is how failure looks\*

\*System overload too many variables too many threats all converging simultaneously\*

The paper feels heavy in my hands heavier than paper should feel and suddenly everything starts feeling weird like I'm underwater but also floating and the residents are all talking at once and---

\*Something's wrong something's terribly wrong with the room with the air with everything\*

\*Danger escalation critical all systems compromised need evacuation protocol but nowhere to evacuate to\*

\*What if we never figure this out what if we're always one step behind what if---\*

\*MALFUNCTION MALFUNCTION MALFUNCTION\*

The sounds get muffled like someone put cotton in my ears and I don't understand what's happening why does everything look far away why do my hands feel like they belong to someone else and---

\*This is it this is the heart attack this is dying alone and nobody will find me for days and---\*

\*Can't process can't analyze can't---\*

\*Mom help me Mom please---\*

\*Error error error error error\*

The lights are too bright and too dim at the same time and I want to call for help but my voice feels stuck and my breathing feels wrong like I forgot how to do it right and the room is spinning and the residents are screaming and---

\*Can't breathe can't think can't see straight and---\*

\*All systems failing all systems---\*

\*So scared so scared so scared and---\*

\*---offline---\*

My fingers are getting tingly and curling up like they're trying to hide and I'm scared so scared because what if I'm dying what if something broke inside me and my chest feels like someone's sitting on it and the voices in my head are just noise now just terror and---

\*This is terror pure terror like nothing I've ever felt and I want to run but my legs feel like jelly and---\*

The tingling spreads to my lips and my face and I can feel my thoughts racing faster and faster like a train with no brakes and everything feels unreal feels like I'm watching this happen to someone else but also drowning in it and---

\*What if I'm losing my mind what if unemployment broke something inside me and the walls are closing in and everything is ending and---\*

My legs feel like lead like they're rooted to the spot and I want to run but I can't move can't think can't do anything but sit here and feel like the world is ending and my heart is beating so fast it might explode and---

\*Maybe I should call ambulance but what if they ask for insurance what if I can't pay and---\*

This feels like punishment feels like judgment for leaving home for standing up to Peter for failing at everything and the guilt crashes over me in waves and I'm going to die alone in a foreign country and---

\*Everything is closing in and the walls are moving and the ceiling is falling and---\*

My fingers and toes are curling in spasms like they have a mind of their own and the hyperventilating feels like suffocating and what if it never stops what if this is permanent what if I damaged my brain and---

\*The panic is feeding on itself getting bigger and stronger and I'm drowning drowning drowning and---\*

Wait.

\*Systems coming back online. Partial function restored. Memory access: panic attack protocol exists.\*

Focus on one thing. Just one thing. Say it out loud. Breathe into your hands.

\*Implementation strategy: repetitive counting breathing regulation learned technique from adolescence\*

"Ninety-nine. Ninety-nine. Ninety-nine."

\*Good keep going the voice is real it's yours it's something to hold onto\*

The voice sounds strange in the muffled air but it's my voice it's real it's something to hold onto and I cup my hands over my mouth and breathe and count and---

\*Don't think don't analyze just count just breathe let the wave pass through\*



"Ninety-nine. Ninety-nine. Ninety-nine."

\*Like being on a beach and you can't control the surf but you can ride it without drowning\*

My breathing slows a little and the spinning slows a little and maybe this isn't death maybe this is just terror maybe this is just my body reacting to too much stress too much fear and---

\*Residents slowly coming back online one by one\*

"Ninety-nine. Ninety-nine. Ninety-nine."

\*If you can think you're losing your mind you probably aren't because you still have insight\*

The tingling starts to fade and the room starts to feel more solid and my breathing becomes more natural and the terror starts to recede like water pulling back from shore and---

\*Don't fight the wave ride the wave let it pass through without resistance\*

"Ninety-nine. Ninety-nine. Ninety-nine."

Like weather. Like a storm that has to blow itself out. And I'm still here. Still breathing. Still alive.

\*All residents reporting back online. Crisis survived. System intact.\*

House meeting time. All residents recovering:

Child-me: \*That was so scary and I thought we were going to die and everything felt wrong and far away but we made it through and---\*

Protector-me: \*System failure documented. Panic attack triggered by financial crisis and eviction threat. Technique successful but need better early warning systems.\*

Achiever-me: \*Survival protocol executed successfully. Counting and breathing method prevented complete breakdown. Can build on this for future episodes.\*

Moral Compass-me: \*Mom would be proud that we didn't give up that we found a way through the terror using what we learned.\*

Strategist-me: \*Crisis management analysis: technique works. Problem-solving ability returns after wave passes. Ready to reassess situation with functional capacity restored.\*

The eviction notice is still on the table and the problems are still real but the terror is manageable now is something I can work with rather than something that's drowning me and---

\*Maybe this is what metamorphosis feels like maybe this is how you learn to survive impossible things\*

Maybe sometimes the most important skill isn't avoiding the waves. Maybe it's learning how to ride them without drowning.

Maybe that's what survival really looks like.

\*All residents accounted for. Ready for next challenge.\*

Just breathe. Just count. Just wait for the storm to pass.

One wave at a time.

CHAPTER 12:  
VOICES  
ACROSS THE  
OCEAN

## Voices Across The Ocean

The phone rings and rings and then Mom's voice comes through all crackling and distant but still warm still familiar and I want to cry just hearing her say my name the way she always says it with that little lift at the end like a question like she's making sure it's really me and---

*Seven dollars for fifteen minutes and seven dollars is food for two days but I need to hear their voices*

The moral weight of this call presses down because how do you talk to people living in poverty about your struggles about almost being evicted about panic attacks about not knowing how anything works when they face real hunger real violence real systemic oppression every day and--

*When Mom answers she sounds tired and I wonder if she's eating enough if they're all eating enough*

I tell her about the pigeons with one foot and the spider in my room and the way the factory smells like flowers and soap and she laughs that laugh I remember from when I was small and used to tell her stories about everything I saw and---

*I ask about everyone's health and she says they're fine but fine could mean anything*

When she asks how I'm being treated I want to tell her about the firing about the eviction notice about the panic attack about feeling like I almost lost my mind but she sacrificed so much for my education and complaining feels like ingratitude and---

*The money I send has to stretch so far and what if it's not enough*

I want to tell her about Peter and his handkerchief about Orin and the garage sale flyers about three weeks of unemployment but I don't want to make her worry don't want her to think I'm not strong enough for this adventure and---

*But also I don't want her to know how close I came to complete breakdown*

Then my little sister gets on the phone and she sounds so grown up and she tells me about school and her friends and I realize she's changing growing up without me and that makes my chest feel tight because I'm missing everything missing birthdays and conversations and---

*Progress report preparation: employment stable at chemical factory, learning valuable skills, financial situation improving gradually*

*She asks about my work and I say it's good because what else can I say*

I ask about the neighbors about the community about whether people are finding work finding hope and she tells me about families that have even less and I realize how privileged I am to have this job this room this chance even after everything that happened and---

*The call costs money every minute costs money and I want to talk longer*

When she asks if I'm sending enough money I say yes because what else can I say how can I tell her I'm barely surviving how can I ask for her blessing to send less when she's already doing without so much and---

*What if they knew how close I came to sleeping on the streets what if they knew about the panic attack*

The conversation becomes a careful dance of protection each of us shielding the other from the full weight of our struggles each of us pretending to be stronger than we feel and---

*When I hang up I feel more alone than before because now I remember everything I'm missing*

*Everyone I can't protect everyone who depends on me being strong enough for this*

House meeting time. All residents processing the weight of deception:

Child-me: *But I want to tell them everything want to say how scared I was and how the room spun and how I almost gave up but I can't because they need me to be strong and---*

Protector-me: *Information security critical. Family morale depends on success narrative. Cannot reveal system failures or financial crises. Must maintain protective barriers.*

Achiever-me: *Strategic communication successful. Confidence levels maintained, support system preserved. Progress narrative established despite temporary setbacks.*

Moral Compass-me: *Mom taught me to always tell the truth but sometimes protecting people you love means carrying burdens alone. Sometimes love requires small deceptions.*

Strategist-me: *Emotional cost-benefit analysis: short-term deception preserves long-term family stability. Alternative truth-telling scenarios result in increased anxiety and decreased functionality.*

Whether the people you love can still love you the same way when you become a stranger who calls from far away and when we hang up I wonder if love sometimes requires these small deceptions these gentle lies that preserve hope and dignity across impossible distances and---

*Family needs every dollar and staying connected costs money we don't really have*

Maybe that's what love looks like across oceans maybe it's protecting each other from truths too heavy to carry maybe it's pretending to be stronger than you feel so the people who believe in you can keep believing and---

*But the loneliness after hanging up feels deeper because now I remember everything they don't know*

Seven dollars for fifteen minutes of pretending everything is okay.

Seven dollars for the sound of home getting farther away.

Seven dollars for love that has to travel through wires and across time zones and around the truth.

Seven dollars for carrying the weight of their hopes while hiding the weight of my fears.

*Maybe that's what growing up really means - becoming strong enough to protect the people who protected you.*

# CHAPTER 13:

# CHEMISTRY

## Chemistry

The factory smells like soap and flowers and something sharp that makes my nose tingle and there are these huge vats everywhere with paddles that stir and stir like giant soup pots and I wonder what would happen if you fell in would you come out clean or would you dissolve and---

*The chemicals smell strong and what if they're dangerous what if I'm breathing poison*

There's dignity in this work in mixing soap and shampoo that will clean and care for people in being part of the process that makes daily life better and Dad always said honest work serves God regardless of the title regardless of the prestige and---

*This job feels like salvation feels like rescue from disaster after everything that happened*

The chemistry is like magic watching liquids change colors when you add different things like that clear stuff that turns the white cream pink and makes it smell like roses and Germain shows me how to measure exactly how much of each ingredient and---

*Germain shows me the safety equipment but what if it's not enough what if there's an accident*

Here I am using chemistry knowledge to create products that matter to real people and Germain treats me with respect treats my questions seriously doesn't make me feel stupid for not knowing industrial processes and after Peter and Orin this feels like a miracle and---

*Production efficiency analysis shows this requires precise measurement timing coordination quality control*

*The measuring has to be so exact and what if I make a mistake what if I ruin a whole batch*

Because too much makes it runny too little makes it thick and everything has to be perfect has to be precise like a recipe for beautiful things and I love watching the paddles turn love seeing the mixture get smooth and creamy and---

*Morning shift 6 AM to 2 PM would allow afternoon medical residency prep time if that ever becomes possible again*

The other workers are kind are welcoming don't seem to care that I'm foreign that I'm overqualified that I'm here because I couldn't find anything else and there's something beautiful about the precision required about the way each ingredient has its purpose its place and---

*What if they decide I'm not worth the trouble and winter is coming real winter*

Germain has an Engineering Degree just like me he's working here until he finds something better and he understands what it's like to be overqualified to be waiting for the right opportunity and he doesn't make me feel ashamed for being here and---



*At least it's honest work at least I'm contributing something useful making products people need*

Love the way different bottles have different smells and different purposes and some make shampoo and some make lotion and some make soap that will make people feel clean and pretty and I wonder about the people who will use these things---

*Will they know that someone named Toye mixed their shampoo will they care that I was careful*

The paycheck means family gets money means rent gets paid means I'm contributing again means I'm not just surviving but providing and that feels good feels right feels like honoring the investment they made in my education and---

*The mixing has to be perfect and one wrong measurement ruins everything just like medicine*

Maybe this isn't what they envisioned when they sent me to medical school but work is work service is service and making things that help people is still helping people even if it's not with stethoscopes and prescriptions and---

*Germain's management style patient methodical values precision over speed workplace dynamics cooperative minimal conflicts*

The measurements matter so much that Germain makes me practice over and over until I can pour exactly the right amount without looking at the measuring cup and when I get it right when the mixture turns the perfect color and has the perfect texture---

*This correlates directly to medical practice requirements surgical procedures this is excellent training*

Maybe God doesn't care about the letters after your name maybe God cares about whether you show up whether you do your best whether you treat every task as sacred whether you remember that all honest work has value and---

*But what if chemistry is harder than it looks and I mess up something important*

It feels like creating something beautiful like being part of something bigger than myself and maybe this is what it means to make the world a little bit better one batch at a time and---

*Process correlation between precision and outcome quality exactly what medical work requires*

Germain tells me about his engineering projects back home about the bridges he designed the problems he solved and I tell him about medical school about my dreams of helping people and we understand each other in a way that goes beyond workplace conversation and---

*Maybe this is what hope looks like rebuilding one careful step at a time*

Whether it's soap or medicine, precision and care matter. Whether it's chemistry or surgery, the process is sacred.

One batch at a time. One patient at a time. One careful step toward something better.

*Maybe redemption isn't dramatic maybe it's just showing up every day and doing good work with good people*

Maybe this is what healing looks like after everything falls apart. Maybe this is how you rebuild trust in the world one careful measurement at a time.

*Ready for whatever comes next.*

# RESOLUTION

## ***WAR AND DESTRUCTION***

---

*DOES HEAVEN EVEN HEAR THESE MUFFLED CRIES?  
IS IT TOO FAR FROM HERE OR JUST A DEAF EAR?  
DOES THE CREATOR SLEEP OR ARE THEY IN TOO DEEP  
DO ANGELS WATCH WHILE THEY LIVE IN FEAR?*

*IF THEIR MINDS COULD TRY WOULD IT FIGHT OR FRIGHT  
ASK THE SOUL TO STAY THROUGH THESE DREARY YEARS  
THEIR BODIES SHAKE WITH THE PAIN IT TAKES  
AND THE MIND DECAYS AS THE SPIRIT BREAKS*

*IF THE SOUL IS CUT IT WOULD NOT SHED A TEAR  
FOR THE HEART STILL BEATS AS THE SPIRIT BLEEDS  
THE SOUL SLOWLY DIES FROM THIS AMAZING FEAT  
IT WOULD SIMPLY BE LIKE THEY WERE NEVER HERE*

*FOR ONE GENERATION BEARS THE BLAME  
WHILE THE NEXT GENERATION WEARS THE STAIN  
THREE GENERATIONS TO PUT OUT THE FLAME  
NOW THEY NO LONGER CRY OUT IN PAIN*

# CHAPTER 14:

## THE CALL

## The Call

Walking up the stairs to my room and my feet hurt and my bones ache and it's dark outside just like it was dark when I left for the factory at 6 AM and I wonder if this is what the rest of my life looks like working in the dark coming home in the dark never seeing sunlight and---

*Exhausted from another twelve-hour day mixing chemicals but at least it's honest work*

I put the key in the lock and push open the door and there's that blinking light on the answering machine and my stomach clenches because who would call me and lately every piece of mail every phone call has been another rejection from another medical program and---

*Months of rejections from every medical program in Canada every single one saying no*

The blinking light makes me think about that day months ago when I bought this machine when it cost almost a month's wages and Germain thought I was crazy and I couldn't really explain why I needed it just had this feeling this intuition that something important might happen when I wasn't home and---

*What if it's the landlord what if something's wrong what if it's more bad news*

I almost don't want to press play almost want to leave the mystery unsolved because lately mysteries turn into disappointments turn into more evidence that medical school was a foolish dream and maybe I should just accept that mixing soap is my destiny and---

*The Medical Officer Training Program with the Armed Forces said yes but only if I find a residency first*

I push the button anyway because what else do you do when mystery calls and the voice that comes out is Canadian accented and official sounding and he's talking about medical residency and Saskatoon City Hospital and immediate opening and---

*My brain can't process it can't believe it because good things don't happen not after months of rejection letters*

Their original candidate backed out and they need someone right away and I play it again because maybe I heard wrong maybe I'm so desperate I'm imagining good news and he says his name is Dr. Morrison and there's a position available if I'm interested and---

*This is impossible this has to be a mistake after every program in Canada said no*

I sit on my bed staring at the machine like it just performed magic like it just turned water into wine and slowly it hits me that if I hadn't bought this answering machine if I hadn't followed that crazy expensive intuition I would never have gotten this message and---

*My Canadian Medical Evaluation exams are only valid for eighteen months and time is running out*

The voice on the machine sounds like an answer to every prayer I've whispered every night and I realize that months ago when I spent almost a month's wages on this machine something inside me knew something my conscious mind couldn't understand and---

*Saskatoon is so far away from everything I know is cold is prairie but it's medical residency*

This feels like Dad reaching across time and death to whisper in my ear to buy the machine to follow the intuition to trust the inner voice that said this purchase matters even when logic said it was wasteful and---

*What if I get there and it's not real what if it's a mistake what if they change their minds*

House meeting time. All residents processing this miracle:

Child-me: *But we're going to be a real doctor again and help people and use our hands to heal instead of mixing soap and I can't believe someone actually said yes after everyone said no and--*  
-

Protector-me: *Opportunity assessment required. Saskatoon unknown territory, winter conditions, complete restart. But medical residency means MOTP activation, Armed Forces salary, career trajectory restoration.*

Achiever-me: *Timeline critical - eighteen-month exam validity countdown, immediate availability advantage, all documentation prepared. This could activate the entire strategic plan.*

Moral Compass-me: *Dad always said trust your inner voice and months ago something told us to buy this machine and now we know why. Sometimes faith means expensive purchases that don't make sense.*

Strategist-me: *Pattern recognition: intuitive decision months ago created possibility for current opportunity. Following inner guidance system resulted in optimal positioning for unexpected vacancy.*

Maybe this is what redemption sounds like maybe this is what it means when people say everything happens for a reason and I need to call back need to say yes need to believe that sometimes the universe rewards people who follow their instincts even when it's expensive and--  
-

*My hands shake as I reach for the phone because this call could save me or destroy me*

That answering machine sitting there blinking faithfully recording messages while I mixed chemicals in the dark and if I hadn't trusted that inner voice that said buy it even though you can't afford it this message would have disappeared into electronic silence and---

*The Armed Forces program the medical career the chance to be Dr. Toye all hanging on this one phone call*

Time to make the call that changes everything.

Time to find out if following your intuition even when it costs a month's wages was the smartest decision you ever made.

Time to discover if dreams really do fall from the sky and get caught by expensive machines you bought on faith.

*Time to call Saskatchewan and find out if this saves everything.*



# CHAPTER 15:

## THE HOUSE

## DECIDES

# The House Decides

The confirmation letter from Saskatoon City Hospital sits on my table like a golden ticket to everywhere I've ever wanted to go and I call them back immediately to say yes of course yes obviously yes and suddenly I'm going to be Dr. Toye again and---

*No decision required no debate needed this is what we've been working toward since the day we arrived*

After I hang up the phone I sit in the silence of my small room and look around at the spider in the corner and the pattern the sunlight makes on the wall and the answering machine that just saved my entire future and I can't move can't think can't process that something good actually happened and---

*From cotton-picking hands to medical residency from dishwasher rejection to doctor acceptance*

My hands are shaking again but not from panic this time from something else entirely from disbelief from relief from terror that this might not be real and I keep reading the letter over and over because what if I imagined it what if desperation finally broke my brain and---

*Is this what rescue feels like or is this what madness feels like*

I think about Germain tomorrow mixing chemicals without me and how do I tell him I'm abandoning the work we do together the precision we perfected and he's been so kind so patient and now I'm just going to disappear like everyone else who gets a better opportunity and---

*The guilt tastes like metal like betrayal even though this is what I've dreamed of*

What if I tell him and he's angry what if he thinks I was just using the job as a stepping stone what if he's right

The factory workers who welcomed me who didn't make me feel foreign who treated me like family and now I'm going to vanish into the middle of Saskatchewan like I never existed like their kindness meant nothing and---

*Success feels like theft like I'm stealing something that belongs to someone more deserving*

I want to call Mom want to share this miracle but the international charges and what if telling her makes it disappear what if speaking it out loud breaks the spell and I'm back to mixing soap in the dark and---

*What if good things only last as long as you keep them secret*

The letter keeps sitting there refusing to vanish refusing to turn back into a rejection like all the others and slowly very slowly something shifts in my chest some tight place starts to loosen and--

*Maybe this is real maybe this is actually happening maybe I'm allowed to have good things*

But then the fear rushes back because what if I get to Saskatoon and they realize they made a mistake what if I can't handle prairie winters what if I'm not smart enough what if I fail the residency what if I prove everyone right who said I didn't belong and---

*Success is more terrifying than failure because failure you expect but success means everything can be lost*

House meeting time. All residents processing this impossible reversal:

Child-me: *But we did it we actually did it and I'm scared and excited and confused because I thought good things only happened to other people and what if we're not supposed to be happy what if something terrible happens to balance this out and---*

Protector-me: *Threat assessment complicated. Success creates new vulnerabilities - higher expectations, more to lose, unfamiliar territory. But medical residency means stability, means validation, means we survived. Need protocols for managing imposter syndrome and success anxiety.*

Achiever-me: *Goal achievement analysis: medical residency secured but transition management required. Leave factory with dignity, maintain relationships, document lessons learned. Success probability high but preparation critical. Every skill learned here transfers to medical practice.*

Moral Compass-me: *Germain deserves honest conversation about departure. Factory workers deserve gratitude not disappearance. Mom deserves to know her sacrifices paid off. Success without integrity isn't success at all.*

Strategist-me: *Pattern recognition: answering machine purchase was strategic intuition, unemployment taught resilience, panic attacks taught coping mechanisms. Every crisis prepared us for this moment. Framework proven - hope plus action equals opportunity.*

The room feels different now like the walls have shifted like the light has changed color and I realize that success doesn't feel like victory it feels like vertigo like standing on the edge of a cliff wondering whether you're about to fly or fall and---

*When you've lived on the bottom for so long the top feels like a foreign country*

Tomorrow I have to tell Germain I'm leaving and figure out how to say thank you for treating me like a human being when others didn't how to say I'm sorry for abandoning you how to say this isn't about you being not enough it's about me becoming something else and---

*How do you honor the people who kept you alive while chasing the dreams that take you away from them*

I think about hope and how it's not just wishing but an active process of convincing yourself over and over that good outcomes are possible and buying that answering machine was hope in action was believing something good might happen even when logic said save the money and---

*Hope is free and by being hopeful you increase your chances of getting the results you want*

Every day I had to validate myself when the world invalidated me when Peter mocked me when employers rejected me when I felt worthless and learning that validation comes from within that I am the banker of my own worth that external validation only works by reminding me to make internal deposits and---

*Self-affirmation equals deposit anything else equals withdrawal and I am the only one who controls my account*

Being my own best friend meant not judging myself for the panic attack for the unemployment for the confusion about Canadian culture but helping myself through it like I would help someone I love and asking always am I being my own best friend with this action and---

*No matter how you feel about yourself there is only one action option and that is the action of being a best friend*

The spider in the corner has been building and rebuilding her web all these months and I wonder if she knows I'm leaving if she'll miss having someone to watch her work if the next person who lives here will notice her determination and---

*Every experience was an opportunity for learning even the ones I would have gladly skipped*

Maybe this is what redemption looks like not a clean ending but a messy beginning full of guilt and gratitude and terror and possibility all mixed together like the chemicals I've been learning to measure perfectly and---

*How I perceive things is just as important or sometimes more important than what is really happening*

The fear sits beside the joy like uninvited guests at a party and maybe that's normal maybe success always comes with its own anxiety maybe achieving your dreams means learning to live with the fear of losing them and---

*Success is not a destination it's a new kind of responsibility*

Tomorrow I start the conversation with Germain about leaving the conversation with myself about deserving the conversation with Saskatchewan about becoming and tonight I sit with all

these feelings that don't fit together that don't make sense that are bigger than my small room can contain and---

*The most important relationship is the one you have with yourself*

All residents reporting: Ready for Saskatchewan. Terrified of Saskatchewan. Grateful for Saskatchewan. Ready for the next chapter that starts with goodbyes.

But tonight we hold space for the complexity for the guilt and the gratitude for the fear and the hope for the ending that feels like a beginning that feels like falling and flying at the same time.

*We learned that hope is an action validation is a choice and friendship with yourself is the foundation of everything else including the courage to accept good things when they finally come*

Tomorrow Dr. Toye begins. Tonight Toye the survivor rests. Tomorrow the conversations begin. Tonight the feelings just are.

*All residents accounted for. All lessons learned. All hope validated. All fears acknowledged.*

The house has decided. Time to pack for the next adventure. Time to say goodbye to the people who kept us alive. Time to carry their kindness into whatever comes next.

Time to take everything we learned in the darkness and use it to heal people in the light while remembering everyone who helped us find that light.

*Ready to answer the call we've been preparing for our entire lives while honoring the people who prepared us.*