Through My Eyes

By Pierce O'Dell

Free to read.

Free to share.

Written with curiosity.

Questions, feedback, or thoughts:

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Chapter 1

What Is Going On?
Pause for a moment.

Look around.

Not at the things asking for your attention.

Look at reality itself.

Really look.

I exist.
You exist.
We exist.
Think about that.
Not later.
Right now.
Against impossible odds, we are conscious creatures standing on a small planet hurtling through an unimaginably vast universe.
A universe so large our brains can barely comprehend it.
And somehow, that universe produced creatures capable of staring back at it and asking questions.
That’s kind of weird, don’t you think?
Maybe it’s just me.
We don’t know why there is something instead of nothing.
We don’t know exactly how all of this began.
We don’t really know what happens when consciousness ends. We all have ideas, beliefs, and things we’ve been told, but whatever the answer is, nobody knows for sure.
Scientists debate it.
Philosophers debate it.
Religious leaders debate it.
People on the internet definitely debate it.

And while those enormous questions remain unresolved, we keep finding new things to argue about.
Scientists discuss dark matter.
People speculate about aliens.
Experts warn about artificial intelligence and the future of humanity.
And somehow, the biggest thing on my calendar tomorrow might be remembering to buy dog food so my dog doesn't look at me like I betrayed him.
Is that normal?
Maybe it is.
Maybe I'm the weird one.
That's always possible.
But I don't think I'm alone.
I think a lot of people have questions.
Most of us just get busy.
Why are we here?
Why does anything exist?
Why do we suffer?
Why do we love?
Why do we care?
Why do we keep reaching for something more?
And maybe the strangest question of all:
Why does it feel like there should be an answer?
That question has followed me for most of my life, even before I realized it was there.
Not because I expected to find every answer.
But because it always felt like there was something worth searching for.
The funny thing is that questions like these rarely arrive all at once.
They tend to sneak in through side doors.
They begin with small curiosities.
Tiny inconsistencies.
Random thoughts that refuse to leave you alone.

For example, one of mine started with the famous Noah.
Then a series of thoughts somehow led me all the way to fish.
When I was a kid, my mom and I went to hear a Christian historian speak about creation, dinosaurs, nature, and eventually Noah's flood.
You know the story.
The world floods.
Noah builds an ark.
Two of every animal get on the boat.
Simple enough.
At first I followed along like everyone else.
Then I started thinking about the animals.
That's a lot of animals.
Seriously.
How many species are there?
Do you need every species?
Or just two of each kind?
How does that even work?
Then I started thinking about dogs.
We have a lot of different dogs.
Did Noah bring every breed?
Or just two dogs and somehow we ended up with everything we have now?
The more I thought about it, the more confused I became.
Humans got dogs from wolves, right?
Or bred them from wolves.
Or selectively bred them.
Whatever the correct phrase is.
Somewhere along the way, humans looked at wolves and ended up with pugs.
And I'm not saying pugs are aliens.
But I'm not completely ruling it out.

And that’s something I’ve noticed happens a lot.
Just because something doesn’t make sense to me doesn’t mean it isn’t true.
It usually means I don’t understand it yet.
Still...
That’s a lot of animals to fit on one boat.
Hopefully they all just showed up.
Because if Noah had to catch them himself, that sounds exhausting.
And for some reason, every time I picture Noah, I imagine him running around in little wooden shoes.
I have no idea why.
Maybe it came from a children’s book.
Maybe my brain mixed together different historical eras.
I don’t know.
But either way...
Imagine chasing a tiger in those.
Lions, tigers, and bears, oh...
Did you say it?
I bet you did.
Now imagine trying to catch them.
And that’s before we even get to the fish.
By this point, everyone else seemed focused on Noah, the ark, and the flood.
Meanwhile, my attention had drifted somewhere else entirely.
I got stuck on the fish.
What happened to the fish?
Seriously.
The animals needed saving.
The people needed saving.
But the fish were already in the water.
Then my brain kept going.

What about freshwater fish?
What about saltwater fish?
If all that rain was freshwater, what happened to the saltwater fish?
Did they survive?
Did they adapt?
Did they stay where they were?
Were there giant pockets of saltwater floating around somewhere?
Could fish even tell the difference?
I was a kid.
I had absolutely no idea what I was talking about.
Honestly, I still don’t.
But I never forgot the question.
Looking back, I don’t think I was really asking about fish.
At least not entirely.
I think I was discovering something.
Not an answer.
A way of looking at the world.
The realization that it’s okay to stop and wonder.
It’s okay to ask strange questions.
It’s okay to admit you don’t know.
Because the moment you stop pretending you’ve arrived, something interesting happens.
The world gets bigger.
You answer one question, and another appears.
You pull one thread, and three more follow.
The deeper I looked, the larger everything became.
Eventually, all those little questions started pointing toward something much bigger.
Not an answer.
A question.

What are we doing here?
That question would take me places I never expected.
But we’re getting ahead of ourselves.
For now, let’s start where every journey begins.
With a question.

Chapter 2

What Are We Doing Here?
The fish question never really got answered.
At least not by me.
Maybe somebody out there knows exactly what happened to the fish.
Maybe there’s a perfectly reasonable explanation.
Maybe there isn’t.
I honestly don’t know.

—

What I do know is that the fish weren’t the end of the question.

They were the beginning of the road.

—

Because after a while, I started noticing something.
Questions don’t seem to stay where you put them.

—

You ask one.
It leads to another.
Then another.
Then another.
And before you know it, you’re somewhere completely different from where you started.

—

The fish led to Noah.
Noah led to the flood.
The flood led to God.
God led to creation.
Creation led to existence.

And eventually I found myself staring at a question so big that it seemed to swallow every other question around it.

—

What are we doing here?

—

Not just me.
Not just you.
All of us.

—

What is the point of this whole thing?

—

That sounds like the kind of question people ask late at night when they're staring at the ceiling.
Or sitting alone in their truck.
Or walking their dog.
Or trying to fall asleep but their brain decides it's time to solve reality.

—

Which, by the way, is terrible timing.

—

But the question shows up anyway.

—

What are we doing here?

—

Most animals don't seem bothered by this.
At least not from what I can tell.
A bird wakes up and does bird things.
A beaver wakes up and does beaver things.
My dog wakes up, looks for breakfast, checks for squirrels, and somehow manages to get through the entire day without questioning the nature of reality.

—

At least I think he does.
Must be nice.

—

Maybe he’s asking huge questions and just keeping them to himself.
Although if I had to guess, he’s probably more concerned with why I keep stealing his poop and collecting it in little green bags.

—

Fair question.

—

But humans are different.
We don’t just live.
We wonder why we’re living.
We don’t just suffer.
We ask why suffering exists.
We don’t just love.
We ask what love means.
We don’t just die.
We ask what happens after death.

—

That’s strange.
Beautiful.
But strange.

—

Because if we were only here to survive, why would we care about meaning?
Why would beauty move us?
Why would music make us feel something?
Why would we stare at the stars and feel small?
Why would we keep asking questions that don’t help us eat, sleep, work, or pay bills?

—

That’s what bothered me.
Not in a bad way.
More like a splinter in my mind.

—

Humans seem unable to leave reality alone.
We poke at it.
Study it.
Argue about it.
Write books about it.
Build telescopes to look deeper into it.
Build microscopes to look closer into it.
And then somehow still end up asking:

—

What does it all mean?

—

That question is everywhere once you start noticing it.
It hides behind religion.
It hides behind science.
It hides behind ambition.
It hides behind success.
It hides behind entertainment.
It even hides behind boredom.

—

Because boredom itself is kind of strange.
Why do we get bored?
Why isn’t existing enough?
Why do we need purpose?

Why do we need something to do?
Why do we feel restless when life has no direction?

—

Maybe that’s just how humans are.
Maybe we’re wired to search.
Maybe there's a hunger in us that food was never meant to satisfy.

—

That sounds dramatic.
But I think it’s true.

—

Because no matter what people believe, most of us seem to live like there is something we’re supposed to find.
Some people chase money.
Some chase pleasure.
Some chase success.
Some chase love.
Some chase God.
Some chase truth.
Some chase distractions so they don’t have to think about any of it.

—

But everybody seems to be chasing something.

—

And that made me wonder.
Why?

—

Why are humans so restless?
Why do we keep reaching?
Why do we keep searching for something beyond what we already have?

—

Maybe it’s because something about being human feels unfinished.
Not broken.
Not defective.
Just unfinished.

—

A seed becomes a tree.
A puppy becomes a dog.
A child becomes an adult.
Everything seems to grow into something.
And humans do too.
Not just physically.
Something else.
Something harder to explain.

—

We learn.
We change.
We suffer.
We heal.
We become.
At least we’re supposed to.

—

And maybe that’s why questions matter.
Not because they always lead to answers.
But because they keep us moving.
Because the moment you stop asking questions, something stops growing.

—

Which leads to another question.

Why do we keep searching?

Chapter 3

Why Do We Keep Searching?
I think about this one a lot.
Probably more than I should.
Because once I started paying attention, I noticed something.
Everybody is searching for something.
Not some people.
Everybody.

—

The guy chasing money.
The woman chasing success.
The kid chasing approval.
The athlete chasing greatness.
The scientist chasing knowledge.
The believer chasing God.
The skeptic chasing truth.

—

Everybody is chasing something.
And the interesting part is that even when people find what they were looking for, they usually start looking for something else.

—

Why?

—

You would think at some point we’d arrive.
You finally get the job.
Then you want the promotion.
You finally buy the house.

Then you want a bigger one.
You finally get the relationship.
Then you start worrying about keeping it.
You finally reach the goal.
Then you create another goal.

—

It's like there's a horizon built into us.
No matter how far you walk, it’s still out there.

—

And maybe that’s normal.
Maybe that’s growth.
Maybe that’s ambition.
Maybe that’s just life.

—

I don’t know.

—

What I do know is that humans seem uniquely designed to look beyond what’s right in front of them.
A dog gets excited about breakfast.
And honestly, breakfast is pretty great.
But humans eat breakfast and start wondering what happens after death.

—

That’s a weird jump.

—

Sometimes I wonder if curiosity is one of the most interesting things about us.
Think about it.
The smartest people in history couldn’t explain everything.
Not even close.
They couldn’t explain consciousness.

They couldn’t explain why there is something instead of nothing.
They couldn’t explain every mystery of the universe.

—

So why did I think I was going to figure it out while walking my dog?

—

Did I think I was smarter than them?
Not even a little bit.

—

Then why did I keep asking?
Why did I keep pulling on the thread?
Why did I keep chasing questions that might never be answered?

—

Curiosity, I suppose.
Or maybe something more.

—

Because curiosity doesn’t always feel like entertainment.
Sometimes it feels like hunger.
Like something inside you knows there is more, even if you can’t explain what more is.

—

That’s the part I couldn’t ignore.
People don’t just search because they’re bored.
They search because something feels unfinished.

—

We chase answers.
We chase purpose.
We chase love.
We chase meaning.
We chase God.

We chase truth.

—

And when we can’t find those things, sometimes we chase distractions instead.
Anything to quiet the question for a little while.

—

But the question always comes back.

—

Why am I here?
What am I supposed to do?
What is all this for?

—

Maybe that’s why silence can feel uncomfortable.
Because when everything gets quiet, the questions get louder.

—

That’s why people fill the room with noise.
Music.
Television.
Phones.
Work.
Plans.
Conversations.
Anything.

—

And I get it.
I do it too.
Sometimes it’s easier to stay busy than to sit still with your own mind.
Because your mind might ask you something you don’t know how to answer.

—

But maybe that’s not a bad thing.
Maybe the questions that make us uncomfortable are the ones worth paying attention to.

—

Because if we’re all searching...
What exactly are we looking for?

Chapter 4

Why Does It Feel Like Something Is Missing?
If humans are always searching for something...
What exactly are we looking for?
That's the question that kept bothering me.
Not because I had an answer.
Because I couldn't stop noticing it.

—

Everybody seems to be reaching.
For more money.
More success.
More knowledge.
More experiences.
More relationships.
More time.
More meaning.

—

And even when people get what they want, it doesn't seem to last very long.
The new car becomes the old car.
The dream job becomes work.
The exciting relationship becomes normal.
The goal gets achieved, and a new goal appears.

—

Why?

—

You would think eventually we'd arrive somewhere.
You would think eventually we'd sit down and say:

"That's it. I'm completely satisfied."

—

Yet people rarely seem to stay there.

—

Why?

—

Is that a flaw?
Or is that part of being human?

—

I don't know.

—

What I do know is that I've experienced it myself.
There were times I thought:
"If I can just get this one thing, I'll be happy."
Then I got the thing.
And I was happy.
For a while.
Then life kept moving.
And so did I.

—

It could be money.
A relationship.
A better job.
A new place.
A number on a scale.
A goal I was sure would make me feel different once I reached it.
And sometimes it did.
For a little while.

—

That's hard to explain when you really think about it.
Because some of the things we chase are genuinely good things.
Love.
Friendship.
Family.
Achievement.
Purpose.

—

Those things matter.
I don't want to pretend they don't.
A good meal with people you love matters.
A quiet night where everything feels okay matters.
A moment where you feel proud of yourself matters.
Laughing so hard you forget what you were worried about matters.
Those things are real.
They are good.

—

But even the good things don't seem to completely satisfy whatever it is inside of us that's still searching.

—

Why?

—

Maybe we're greedy.
Maybe we're ambitious.
Maybe we're broken.
Or maybe we're unfinished.

—

That word kept coming back to me.

Unfinished.

—

Not in a bad way.
Not like something is wrong with us.

More like a story still waiting for its final chapter.

—

A seed doesn't stay a seed.
A child doesn't stay a child.
A wound doesn't always stay a wound.
Things change.
They grow.
They heal.
They become something else.

—

Humans do too.
Not just physically.
Something deeper.

—

We learn.
We fail.
We suffer.
We heal.
We change.
At least we're supposed to.

—

And maybe that's why it feels like something is missing.
Because we're not done growing.

—

Or maybe that's not it at all.
Maybe the feeling isn't pointing only toward growth.
Maybe it's pointing toward something else.
Something we haven't found yet.
Something we can't quite put into words.

—

Whatever it is, people have been chasing it for as long as humans have existed.
And underneath that chase, another question started to form.
If I'm searching for something...
How do I know what's true?

Chapter 5

What Do We Actually Know?
Once I started wondering if I was searching for the right thing, another question showed up.
A question that sounded simple.
At first.

—

How do I know I'm not wrong?

—

Not wrong about everything.
Just wrong about something important.

—

Because if I'm searching for truth, shouldn't I stop every once in a while and ask whether I'm heading in the right direction?

—

That sounds obvious.
Until you realize how much of your life is built on things you didn't personally verify.

—

I didn't discover gravity.
I trust it.

—

I didn't personally witness most of history.
I trust it.

—

I didn't personally prove the earth goes around the sun.
I trust it.

—

I didn't personally fake the moon landing either.

But I trusted that somebody did.

—

Okay, that's a joke. Maybe.

—

Most of what I know came from somebody else.
Teachers.
Parents.
Books.
Scientists.
Friends.
Pastors.
The internet.

—

Okay, maybe not the internet.
Let's be careful with that one.

—

But seriously.

—

At some point, everybody has to trust something.

—

The question is:
What?

—

And maybe more importantly:
Why?

—

That question bothered me.

Because the deeper I looked, the more I realized that people can be wrong.

—

Really wrong.

—

History is full of people who were completely convinced of things that weren't true.

—

And the scary part is they didn't know they were wrong.

—

If they had known, they wouldn't have believed it.
At least I hope not.

—

That realization hit me harder than I expected.

—

Because suddenly the question wasn't:
"How can they believe that?"

—

The question became:
"What if I'm doing the same thing?"

—

That was uncomfortable.

—

It's easy to question other people.
It's much harder to question yourself.

—

Especially when the thing being questioned is something you've believed for years.

—

But if truth matters, then it has to matter even when it's inconvenient.

—

Otherwise, I'm not really looking for truth.
I'm looking for agreement.

—

And those are not the same thing.

—

The strange thing about truth is that it doesn't need my permission.

—

Gravity worked before anyone discovered it.
The stars existed before anyone named them.
The universe was doing whatever the universe does long before humans showed up and started arguing about it.

—

Truth doesn't care what I believe.

—

That was both comforting and terrifying.

—

Comforting because truth exists whether I understand it or not.
Terrifying because it means I can be wrong.

—

And if I can be wrong...
What else can I be wrong about?

—

That question followed me everywhere.
Faith.
Science.
History.
Relationships.
Myself.

—

Especially myself.

—

Because eventually I noticed something strange.
People don't always believe things because they're true.
Sometimes people believe things because they're comfortable.

—

Which led to another question.

—

Why do we believe what we believe?

Chapter 6

Why Do We Believe What We Believe?
Once I realized how much of my life was built on things I trusted, I had to ask a harder question.
Why do I believe the things I believe?

—

At first, that sounded easy.
Because they’re true.
Obviously.

—

Then I realized something uncomfortable.
Everybody thinks that.

—

Scientists.
Believers.
Skeptics.
Conspiracy theorists.
Pastors.
Professors.
Random strangers arguing online at two in the morning.
Everybody thinks they’re right.

—

But everybody can’t be right.
So how does that work?

—

If two people believe completely opposite things, they can both be sincere.
They can both be intelligent.

They can both be well-intentioned.
And one of them can still be wrong.
Maybe both of them.

—

That forced me to sit with something I didn’t really like.
Sincerity is not enough.

—

You can sincerely believe something and still be mistaken.
History is full of examples.
People used to believe the earth was the center of the universe.
People used to believe diseases came from bad air.
Some people think Star Wars is the greatest series of all time.

—

In my opinion, it’s extremely overrated.
Good.
But overrated.

—

The point is that people can be completely convinced of something and still be wrong.
And disagreement alone does not prove who is right.

—

That is where things get messy.
Because most of us do not build our beliefs from scratch.
We inherit them.
We absorb them.
We pick them up from family, culture, friends, churches, schools, books, podcasts, social media, and whatever corner of the internet we accidentally wandered into.

—

Some beliefs are handed to us.
Others are repeated so often they start to feel obvious.

And after a while, we stop asking where they came from.
They just become part of us.

—

Santa Claus might be one of the first places a lot of kids experience that.
As a kid, Santa feels magical.
The reindeer.
The sleigh.
The cookies.
The presents.
The mystery of it all.
A man somehow visits the whole world in one night, eats snacks at every house, squeezes down chimneys, and no one questions the physics of any of it.
At least not at first.

—

Then one day you find out it was not true.
And maybe for some kids, that is not a big deal.
But for others, it is a real disappointment.
Because as a kid, you trusted the story.
You trusted the people who told you the story.
And then suddenly you have to ask:
Wait.
What else is not true?
What else did I believe just because someone I trusted told me?

—

And I’m not saying that to attack parents or ruin Christmas.
I still do Christmas.
I told my kid about Santa Claus.
I did Elf on the Shelf.
I get it.

It’s fun.
It’s sweet.
It gives kids something magical to look forward to.
That is not the part I’m questioning.

—

I’m just asking what happens when a child grows up and realizes one of the most magical stories they believed was not true.
Because once that happens, even in a small way, a door opens.
Maybe not for everyone.
Maybe not dramatically.
But it can open.
And behind that door is a question.

—

What else have I accepted without examining?

—

That question does not stay with childhood stories.
It follows us into adulthood.
Politics.
Culture.
Relationships.
Worldviews.
Even religion.
Not because all of those things are false.
But because any belief can become something we protect before we examine.

—

Maybe adults do the same thing.
We hold onto stories.
Ideas.
Systems.

Beliefs.
Not always because we know they are true.
Sometimes because they are comfortable.
Because they are familiar.
Because they feel like ours.

—

And that’s where I think things can get dangerous.
Because something can feel like my truth and still not be the truth.

—

That line matters.
Because beliefs are not just thoughts floating around in our heads.
They shape us.
They shape how we live.
How we see people.
What we fear.
What we love.
What we think is possible.

—

A belief can make you brave.
A belief can make you cruel.
A belief can give you hope.
A belief can trap you.

—

That is why this mattered to me.
Because if my beliefs were shaping my life, I couldn’t afford to never examine them.
I couldn’t just believe something because it was familiar.
Or reject something because it sounded strange.
I couldn’t agree with people just because I liked them.
Or disagree because I didn’t.

—

Truth had to be bigger than preference.
Otherwise, I wasn’t searching for truth.
I was just protecting myself.

—

And maybe that is what people do more often than we realize.
We protect what feels safe.
We defend what feels familiar.
We avoid questions that might cost us something.

—

I understood that.
I still do.

Because questioning your beliefs can feel like pulling boards out of the floor while you're still standing on it.
You don’t know what is underneath.
You don’t know if it will hold.
You don’t know if you’ll fall.

—

But if the floor is weak, pretending it is strong does not make you safer.
It just delays the collapse.

—

And maybe that is why foundations matter.
Because you can build a whole life on something without ever asking whether it can actually hold weight.

—

Beliefs are like that.
Systems are too.
Even religious ones.

—

Sometimes systems help us understand truth.
But they can also become boxes.
For people.
For the world.
For God.

—

And maybe the danger is not having a system.
Maybe the danger is forgetting that a system is still human.
Limited.
Imperfect.
Built by people who are also trying to understand.

—

A system can point toward truth.
But it is not truth itself.
A tradition can help explain God.
But it is not God Himself.
A box can organize things.
But it can also become too small.

—

And if there really is a Creator behind all of this, I should probably be careful about assuming God fits neatly inside anything humans built.
Even the things built to understand God.

—

That thought made belief feel more serious.
Because if I was going to search for truth, I couldn’t only question the beliefs I disagreed with.
I had to question the boxes I liked too.

—

I had to ask:

Is this belief true enough to become part of me?

—

Because that is what beliefs do.
They don’t stay outside of us.
They become part of how we see.
Part of how we think.
Part of how we live.
Part of who we become.

—

So if my beliefs are false, the problem is not only that I am wrong about an idea.
The problem is that I may be building myself around something that cannot hold me.

—

That was not easy to admit.
But it felt necessary.
Because the greatest obstacle to truth might not be ignorance.
It might be the quiet certainty that I have already found it.

—

And if that is true, then the search cannot only be about questioning the world.
It has to become more personal than that.
Because eventually, if I keep looking for truth honestly, I am going to run into something uncomfortable.
Not just what I believe.
Not just why I believe it.
But what I am willing to ignore so I can keep believing it.

—

Which led me to the next question.
Why do we lie to ourselves?

Chapter 7

Why Do We Lie To Ourselves?
If my beliefs can become part of me, then questioning them is not simple.
It is not just an intellectual exercise.
It is personal.
Because at some point, the search for truth stops being about ideas out there.
It starts pressing on something closer.
Me.

—

That is where things get uncomfortable.
Because it is easy to spot dishonesty in other people.
The politician.
The salesman.
The person online arguing about something they clearly spent twelve seconds researching.

—

Those are easy.

—

What is harder is realizing that sometimes the person fooling me is me.

—

I don’t like that thought.
Because I like to think of myself as an honest person.
Most people do.

—

But humans have an incredible ability to ignore things they do not want to see.
And once I noticed that, I had to ask:
Why?

—

Why do we do that?
If truth matters so much, why do we spend so much energy avoiding it?

—

I don’t think people usually lie to themselves because they love lies.
I think people lie to themselves because truth can hurt.

—

Truth can cost you something.
Pride.
Comfort.
Certainty.
Control.
An identity you spent years building.
A version of yourself you were not ready to let go of.

—

And that is scary.

—

Because sometimes a lie feels safe.
Sometimes denial feels easier.
Sometimes distraction feels better than facing what you already know.

—

I’ve done that.
More than once.

—

There have been times I knew something was wrong, but I didn’t want to look at it directly.
So I explained it away.
Made excuses.

Told myself I needed more time.
When really, I just didn’t want to face what was already obvious.
I stayed busy.
Changed the subject in my own mind.
Found something else to focus on.

—

That sounds ridiculous when you say it out loud.
But people do it all the time.

—

We avoid the hard conversation.
We ignore the warning signs.
We defend the habit.
We justify the anger.
We pretend we are fine.

—

And the whole time, some quiet part of us knows.

—

That is the part I kept coming back to.
Not because I had it figured out.
Because I recognized it.

—

I think most people know more than they admit.
Not everything.
Not all the answers.
But enough.
Enough to know when something is off.
Enough to know when they are hiding.
Enough to know when they are not being honest with themselves.

—

But knowing and admitting are not the same thing.

—

Admitting requires movement.
Admitting means something may have to change.
And change is uncomfortable.

—

Sometimes change is uncomfortable in the smallest ways.
Like socks.
I know that sounds ridiculous, but stay with me.
Once socks come off my feet, they do not go back on.
Especially if they are wet.
Absolutely not.
I do not care if I only wore them for ten minutes.
Once they are off, they are off.

Because the moment I know they are dirty, sweaty, or wet, I cannot unknow it.
I can put them back on.
Technically.
But I’m going to know.

—

And that is kind of how truth works sometimes.
Once you know something is off, you can still go back to it.
But you do not get to go back without knowing.

—

Maybe that is why truth can feel threatening.
Not because truth is bad.
But because truth asks for a response.

—

If something is true, I cannot just unsee it.
I can ignore it.
I can fight it.
I can pretend it does not matter.
But somewhere inside, I know.

—

That makes truth different from opinion.
Opinions can be negotiated.
Truth just stands there.

—

Which is annoying.

—

But it is also what makes truth valuable.
Because if truth changed every time I felt uncomfortable, it would not be truth.
It would just be preference.

—

And I already knew where that road led.
Agreement.
Comfort.
Self-protection.

—

Not truth.

—

So if I was serious about truth, I could not only question other people.
I had to question myself.
My motives.
My assumptions.
My excuses.

My blind spots.

—

That is where the search got harder.
Because it stopped being about winning arguments.
It became about becoming honest.

—

And honesty is expensive.

—

Sometimes it costs pride.
Sometimes it costs certainty.
Sometimes it costs comfort.
Sometimes it costs the version of yourself you were trying to protect.

—

Maybe that is why people lie to themselves.
Not because they are evil.
Because the truth can be expensive.

—

But if truth matters, eventually comfort has to take a back seat.
At least that is what I kept discovering.

—

And maybe distraction is one of the easiest ways to avoid truth.
Because distraction does not always look like rebellion.
Sometimes it looks like normal life.
Work.
Bills.
Schedules.
Groceries.
Messages.

Noise.
Entertainment.
Another episode.
Another scroll.
Another thing to do.

—

And none of those things are automatically bad.
That is what makes it hard.
They are normal.
Some are necessary.
Some are good.

—

But if I never stop long enough to notice the journey I am on, even normal life can become a hiding place.

—

And if there is such a thing as an enemy of truth...
Maybe distraction would be one of the easiest ways to keep people from ever becoming who they were meant to be.
Not evil-looking distraction.
Not obvious darkness.
Just noise.
Busyness.
Comfort.
Entertainment.
Responsibility.
Good things, even.
Things that are not wrong by themselves.
But things that can keep a person moving so fast they never stop long enough to ask:
What am I becoming?

What am I supposed to be?

—

I don’t know.
I am not trying to build a whole theory around that.
But the question is worth noticing.
Because maybe one of the greatest dangers is not that I will never find the truth.
Maybe it is that I will stay busy enough to never follow it.

—

I might miss who I was supposed to become because I never stopped long enough to notice the journey I was on.

—

And I don’t mean that in a way that should make people panic.
Because someone might read that and think:
I work sixty hours a week.
I have kids to raise.
I have bills to pay.
I have people depending on me.
How am I supposed to stop and become who I’m supposed to become?

—

But maybe that is the wrong way to ask it.
Because you are not waiting to become somebody.
You are somebody now.

—

If you are the mom raising five kids, that matters.
If you are the dad working long hours, that matters.
If you are the person picking up trash, stocking shelves, driving a truck, cooking dinner, answering emails, cleaning the house, or just trying to make it through the week, that matters too.
That may be exactly where your journey is right now.

—

The question is not whether your life looks important from the outside.
The question is what is happening inside you while you live it.
Are you becoming more honest?
More humble?
More loving?
More awake?
More true?

—

Because even if ordinary life keeps us busy, it does not have to stop us from growing.
Even if the system keeps moving, something inside us can still keep walking.

—

And maybe that is what truth asks for in return.
Honesty.
Not perfect understanding.
Not instant answers.
Just enough honesty to keep walking when the truth starts costing something.

—

And once I realized that, I couldn’t avoid the next question.
If I kept following truth...
Where was it going to lead?

Chapter 8

What Was Waiting at the End of the Road?
If I kept following truth...
Where was it going to lead?
That question made me nervous.
Because it is one thing to ask questions when they feel far away.
It is another thing to realize the questions might actually be taking you somewhere.
Somewhere real.
Somewhere that might change how you see everything.

—

That is the part I could not ignore.
I did not want to ask questions just so I could feel curious.
I wanted to know where they were pointing.
And the more I looked, the more strange it became.
Because the questions did not seem random anymore.
Existence.
Meaning.
Morality.
Suffering.
Beauty.
Consciousness.
The fact that anything exists at all.
Different questions.
Different roads.
But they kept bending toward the same mystery.

—

What if there is something behind all of this?

What if there is a Creator?
What if there is a God?

—

And I know that word can make people tense up.
God.
For some people, that word brings comfort.
For others, it brings anger.
For some, it brings memories.
For others, it brings arguments.
Church.
Religion.
Rules.
Hypocrisy.
Politics.
Labels.
Systems.
People.
And people are complicated.

—

So before going any further, maybe it helps to strip some of that away for a second.
Not forever.
Not because those things don't matter.
But just long enough to ask the question honestly.
Before denomination.
Before tradition.
Before arguments.
Before the version of God people use to win debates.
Before the version of God people use to control others.
Before the version of God I may have built in my own head.

Just the question itself.

—

What if there is no God?
What would that mean?
And then, just as honestly:
What if there is?

—

Because either answer matters.
If there is no God, then reality is still unbelievable.
Somehow there is something instead of nothing.
Somehow life exists.
Somehow consciousness showed up.
Somehow love, morality, beauty, meaning, and longing became part of the human experience.
Somehow creatures standing on a rock flying through space started asking why they exist.
That is not a small thing.

—

But if there is a God, that changes everything too.
Then reality is not just reality.
It is creation.
Life is not just life.
It has meaning.
Truth is not just something humans invent.
It is something we discover.
And maybe I am not just a random person walking around asking strange questions.
Maybe I am created.
Maybe the questions are not random either.
Maybe they are pointing somewhere.

—

That is why I couldn't treat the question lightly.
I didn't want to believe in God just because I was raised around faith.
I didn't want to reject God just because some people make religion look ugly.
I didn't want to accept something because it was comfortable.
And I didn't want to reject something because it was inconvenient.
If truth mattered, then I had to let the question be honest.

—

Is there a God?

—

That question felt different from the others.
Because with most questions, I was searching for an answer.
With this one, I started wondering if the answer might be searching for me.

—

And I know that sounds strange.
Maybe even too dramatic.
But that is what it felt like.
Like the road wasn't just leading me somewhere.
Like something was pulling.
Not forcing.
Not yelling.
Not demanding.
Just quietly drawing.
Through curiosity.
Through beauty.
Through suffering.
Through the ache for meaning.
Through the fact that truth kept mattering no matter how much I tried to make it smaller.

—

I still had questions.
A lot of them.
I had questions about suffering.
Questions about religion.
Questions about the Bible.
Questions about why a Creator would make a world like this.
Questions about why people who claim to know God can still be so broken.
Questions about myself.
Especially myself.

—

But I couldn't pretend the God question wasn't there anymore.

It was waiting at the end of every road I kept following.
And eventually, I had to stop walking around it.

—

So I asked it honestly.
If there is a Creator...
What is that Creator like?
And if reality was created...
Why does the world look the way it does?

Chapter 9

Why Does the World Look the Way It Does?
If there is a Creator...
Why does the world look like this?
That question is easy to ask from a distance.
But suffering does not stay distant.
It finds people.
Real people.
People I love.
Sometimes it finds me.

—

I think about the phone calls that change everything.
The kind where life feels normal right before it doesn’t.
One conversation.
One diagnosis.
One accident.
One loss.
And suddenly the world feels different.
Not slightly different.
Different.

—

That is what suffering does.
It interrupts.
It walks into ordinary life uninvited.
One minute someone is making plans.
Going to work.
Buying groceries.

Laughing at something stupid.
Trying to figure out what to eat for dinner.
And then something happens.
And the world does not feel safe the same way anymore.

—

That is when the question stops being distant.
It is not in a classroom.
Not in a debate.
Not in a religious argument.
It is just there.
In life.
In loss.
In the silence after bad news.
In the helpless feeling of watching someone hurt and not being able to fix it.

—

Why is the world like this?

—

If there is a Creator, that question becomes even harder to ignore.
Because if reality was created, then eventually I had to look at the creation.
And when I looked around, I saw beauty.
But I also saw suffering.
Neither could be ignored.

—

A sunset is beautiful.
Music is beautiful.
Love is beautiful.
Laughter is beautiful.
Watching your kid smile is beautiful.
Watching someone get the chance they have been dreaming about is beautiful.

Even ordinary moments can be beautiful when you actually stop long enough to notice them.

—

But the same world also holds pain.
Heartbreak.
Disease.
Violence.
Loss.
Depression.
Death.

—

How can one world hold both beauty and brokenness?

—

That question stayed with me.
Because if there is no Creator, suffering is still painful, but maybe it is easier to explain.
Things happen.
Nature does what nature does.
People hurt each other.
The universe does not care.
Okay.
That is still heavy.
But it makes a kind of sense.

—

But if there is a Creator?
Then the question changes.
Why create a world that contains both beauty and suffering?
Why does life feel meaningful and painful at the same time?
Why are we capable of both love and cruelty?
Why can something feel so worth living for...

and still hurt this much?

—

I did not know what to do with that.
Because I could not pretend the world was only beautiful.
It is not.
But I also could not pretend the world was only broken.
It is not that either.

—

Life is not just dark.
And it is not just light.
It is both.
Sometimes in the same day.
Sometimes in the same person.
Sometimes in the same moment.

—

Someone can be laughing with people they love while carrying pain no one knows about.
A day can be good and still have something heavy underneath it.
The sky can feel peaceful for ten seconds before the mind goes right back to everything it is worried about.

—

That is life.
Beautiful.
Heavy.
Strange.
All of it.

—

And maybe that is why suffering is such a hard question.
Because it is not just an idea.
It is personal.

Everybody has touched it somehow.
Maybe through loss.
Maybe through disappointment.
Maybe through anxiety.
Maybe through depression.
Maybe through watching someone they love hurt.
Maybe through waking up and feeling tired of being themselves.

—

Not tired from lack of sleep.
Tired deeper than that.
The kind of tired that makes the day feel heavy before it even starts.

—

I know that feeling.
Not as an idea.
As a person.
I have had losses I still do not fully know what to do with.
I have watched depression steal light from people.
I have seen addiction turn someone into a version of themselves they probably never wanted to become.
I have lost people.
I have been angry.
I have been tired.
I have had seasons where I could still see beauty around me, but I could not feel it the way I wanted to.

—

And I know I am not the only one.
Everyone’s story looks different.
Pain has different names.
But pain has a way of making strangers feel familiar.

Because underneath the details, a lot of people are carrying something.

—

Some people carry things they never talk about.
They still go to work.
Still answer messages.
Still laugh when they need to.
Still show up for other people.
But something in them is tired.

—

That is why I want to be careful here.
I do not want to explain suffering like it is simple.
It is not.
I do not want to turn pain into a lesson too quickly.
Some pain does not need a speech.
It needs silence.
It needs someone to sit there and not look away.

—

Because beauty does not erase suffering.

And suffering does not erase beauty either.
That is what confused me.
Still does sometimes.
The world gives both.
A child laughing.
A funeral.
A good meal.
A hospital room.
A sunset.
A diagnosis.
A song that makes life feel beautiful.

A silence that makes life feel lonely.

—

How does anyone make sense of both?

—

I think that is where a lot of people struggle with the idea of God.
Not because they hate truth.
Not because they are shallow.
Sometimes people struggle because the world hurts.
And if someone has been hurt badly enough, the question is not philosophical anymore.
It is personal.

—

If there is a Creator...
Why did this happen?
Why did they die?
Why did I have to endure this?
Why was I hurt?
Why do innocent people suffer?
Why does evil exist?

—

Those are not small questions.
And I do not want to pretend they are.
I do not want to slap an easy answer on pain and act like that fixes it.
It does not.
Some questions should make us quiet for a minute.
Some pain deserves more than a quick explanation.

—

So maybe the honest thing is to sit there for a second.
No answer.

No lesson.
No attempt to make it smaller than it is.
Just the weight of it.
Because some things are heavy.
And pretending they are not does not make anyone stronger.
It just makes people less honest.

—

But even then, I kept noticing something.
Suffering changes people.
Sometimes for the worse.
Sometimes for the better.
Sometimes both.
It can make people bitter.
It can make people compassionate.
It can destroy faith.
It can deepen it.
It can close someone off.
It can break someone open.

—

Why does suffering shape people so differently?
I do not know.
But it does.
Suffering does not seem to create only one kind of person.
It reveals something.
Or exposes something.
Or maybe it brings something to the surface that was already there.

—

I want to be careful saying that.
Because I do not want to make suffering sound good.

It is not good.
Pain is pain.
Loss is loss.
Evil is evil.
Depression is not beautiful.
Grief is not cute.
Brokenness is not something to romanticize.

—

But somehow, even in suffering, something can happen.
Not always.
And not in a way that makes the suffering okay.
But sometimes, people become softer.
More honest.
More compassionate.
More aware of what matters.
Sometimes pain strips away things that seemed important.
Sometimes it shows what cannot be carried alone.
Sometimes it makes people ask questions they were too busy to ask before.

—

And maybe that is part of why suffering feels so exposing.
It shows limits.
No matter how strong a person tries to be, there are things that cannot be fixed alone.
There are wounds no one can logic their way out of.
There are questions the mind cannot fully answer.
There are nights where being tough does not help.
There are moments where pretending to be fine only makes the loneliness louder.

—

Maybe that is what suffering reveals.
Not that we are worthless.

Not that we are hopeless.
But that we are not complete on our own.
Unfinished.
Still reaching.
Still needing something we cannot fully give ourselves.

—

I do not know exactly what to do with that.
Because if there is no Creator, then maybe suffering is just part of the world.
Still terrible.
Still painful.
Still worth fighting against.
But maybe easier to explain.
Things break.
People hurt.
Bodies fail.
Nature does what nature does.
The universe keeps moving.

—

But if there is a Creator...
then the question becomes much harder.
And people have wrestled with that question for thousands of years.
Religious people.
Philosophers.
Parents.
Children.
People sitting beside hospital beds.
People standing at graves.
People trying to pray when they are not even sure anyone is listening.

—

Why would a created world hurt this much?

—

I cannot give a clean answer to that.
I do not think anyone can.
Not in a way that makes the pain disappear.
Not in a way that answers every scar.
Not in a way that makes suffering simple.

—

And maybe that is the point.
Not that suffering has no answer.
But that I should be careful pretending I can explain it from the outside.
Because pain is not outside.
It gets in.
It changes how I see.
It changes how I listen.
It changes what questions I am willing to ask.

—

And one of the questions it kept forcing me to ask was this:
If there is a Creator...
why do I still feel incomplete?
Why do I still feel like I need something I cannot give myself?
Why does something in me keep reaching?

—

Maybe I am wrong.
Maybe that ache is just part of being human.
Maybe it does not point anywhere.
But even then, I could not ignore what kept happening inside me.
Because after all the pain...
after all the questions...

after all the things I could not explain...
something in me still wanted to get back up.
Not right away.
Not always.
There were times I did not want to get up.
And that is scary to admit.
Because when pain gets heavy enough, even another day can feel like too much.

—

But somehow, I was still here.
Still breathing.
Still asking.
Still looking for something on the other side of it.
Not because I had an answer.
Not because the pain suddenly made sense.
Not because someone gave me the perfect explanation.
But because some part of me still believed there had to be more than this.
More than surviving.
More than hurting.
More than carrying the same wounds forever.

—

I did not just want an explanation for suffering.
I wanted to know if anything could come after it.
If anything could grow from it.
If anything could be learned from it.
If anything broken could become something else.
Not fixed like it never happened.
Not erased.
Not made cute.
But changed.

Restored, maybe.
Or at least not wasted.

—

And maybe that is where a real reason to keep walking begins.
Not because suffering stops hurting.
Not because every question gets answered.
But because maybe suffering is not the last word.
Maybe there is still something on the other side of it.
Maybe there is still something to become.

—

And if suffering can show us what is broken...
then maybe the next question is not only why it hurts.
Maybe the next question is:
What are we becoming?

Chapter 10

What Exactly Are We Becoming?
After sitting with suffering, everything felt quiet.
Not peaceful.
Quiet.
The kind of quiet that comes after something heavy has been said and nobody knows what to do with it yet.
The questions were still there.
The pain was still there.
The weight was still there.
But life did what life always seems to do.
It kept moving.

—

The sun still came up.
My dog still stared at me like I owed him something.
My daughter still had a question, a story, or a problem that apparently needed my immediate attention.
Work still had to be done.
Dinner still had to be figured out.
And somehow, even after all of that, I could still laugh at something stupid.
Usually something really stupid.

—

Like stubbing my toe on a table and immediately blaming the table.
As if the table moved.
Then my brain wandered into one of its usual rabbit trails.
That table used to be a tree.
Now it is furniture attacking my foot.
Somewhere between those two realities, something changed.

Maybe that is growth.
Maybe that is purpose.
Maybe it is just a strange thing to think about while hopping around in pain.
Either way, it made me laugh.

—

And for some reason, that little moment matters.
Not because it fixes anything.
It doesn’t.
My toe still hurts.
But for a second, I’m not only thinking about the heavy stuff.
I’m laughing.
Maybe that is how life starts coming back.
Not all at once.
Just little moments.
Small cracks of light.
One suspicious table at a time.

—

Sometimes it is not even a joke.
Sometimes life just interrupts itself.
Like nearly dropping my phone, somehow saving it, and spilling my coffee in the process.
For a moment it felt like both a disaster and an athletic achievement.
Then I had to clean it up.
That is life sometimes.
Messy, ridiculous, and still strangely alive.

—

Or sometimes it is something even smaller.
Like seeing a tough-looking little kid at the gym suddenly break into cartwheels while yelling, “Yippee!”
No warning.

No explanation.
Just pure joy.
And for a moment, the whole room felt lighter.

—

That is the part I kept noticing.
Life can hurt deeply and still contain moments that feel alive.
The world can feel broken and still hand me reasons to keep going.
I do not know how that works.
But it does.
Maybe that was the first pulse.
Not a full answer.
Not some bright, shiny version of hope.
Just a sign that life had not left completely.
Something in me was still breathing.
Still noticing.

—

And maybe that matters.
Because suffering can make it feel like everything stops.
But it doesn’t.
Life keeps moving.
And whether I notice it or not, I keep changing with it.

—

I don’t think color always comes back all at once.
Sometimes there is no dramatic breakthrough.
Pain just sits there long enough that eventually I notice I am still here.
Not healed.
Not fixed.
Just awake enough to see the next step.
And maybe that is where a different kind of question begins.

Not why did this happen?
Not yet.
But what can still happen after this?
What can this become?
What can I become?

—

That question felt different after suffering.
Because suffering changes people.
So does loss.
So does success.
Life leaves marks on everything it touches.
Trees grow.
Mountains erode.
Rivers carve stone.
Wounds close.
Scars remain.
Dogs get older.
Cats remain suspicious, as usual.
People change.
Everything seems to be becoming something.
The question is whether that change is leading anywhere.

—

Because change by itself is not always good.
A person can become bitter.
Numb.
Cruel.
Afraid.
A person can become so used to surviving that they forget how to live.
That is still change.

But is it growth?

—

Growth feels different.
Not perfect.
Not shiny.
Not fake positive.
More like becoming more awake.
More honest.
More humble.
More able to love without pretending nothing hurts.
More alive.

—

And that made me wonder.
Why does that feel right?
Why does becoming more loving feel like growth?
Why does becoming more honest feel like growth?
Why does becoming more selfish feel like shrinking?
Why does becoming more bitter feel like decay?

—

I don’t know.
But most people seem to recognize it when they see it.
We disagree about almost everything.
Politics.
Religion.
Money.
Morality.
Star Wars.
But when someone acts with real courage, people notice.
When someone sacrifices for someone else, people notice.

When someone tells the truth even when it costs them, people notice.
When someone forgives when they could have stayed bitter, people notice.
Something in us recognizes it.
Even if we cannot explain why.

—

And maybe that recognition says something.
Maybe love, humility, courage, honesty, and forgiveness do not feel like growth only because someone told me they were good.
Maybe they feel like growth because they are closer to whatever we were made to be.
If there is a Creator...
and if people are made in some kind of image of that Creator...
then maybe the best parts of us are not random.
Maybe they are reflections.
Small ones.
Broken ones.
Imperfect ones.
But reflections still.

—

Maybe that is why love feels different from selfishness.
Why humility feels different from pride.
Why forgiveness feels different from bitterness.
Not because I fully understand God.
I don’t.
My brain is not big enough for that.
I still stub my toe and investigate furniture.
But maybe the fact that we recognize those things at all says something.
Maybe something in us is pointing back to something beyond us.

—

That makes me wonder if growth has a direction.

Maybe we are not just supposed to change.
Maybe we are supposed to become.
And maybe becoming is not random.

—

That thought makes me pause.
Because if growth has a direction, then I cannot only ask:
Am I changing?
I have to ask:
What am I changing into?

—

That question hits differently.
Because I can say I am growing.
But what if I am just getting older?
I can say I am learning.
But what if I am only collecting information?
I can say I am becoming stronger.
But what if I am becoming harder?
Those are not the same thing.

—

Life can make a person hard.
Pain can do that.
Disappointment can do that.
Being let down enough times can do that.
At some point, being guarded can start to feel like wisdom.
Being distant can start to feel like strength.
Not caring can start to feel like freedom.
But I don’t think it is.
I think sometimes it is just pain wearing armor.

—

And honestly, I get that.
There are reasons people build walls.
Sometimes walls are the only reason someone survives a season.
But walls are strange.
They can keep pain out.
But they can also keep love out.
They can protect.
But they can also trap.
And eventually I had to ask myself:
Am I becoming stronger?
Or just harder to reach?

—

Because I don’t want to become the kind of person who survives life but loses the ability to feel it.
I don’t want to get so good at protecting myself that I forget how to be open.
I don’t want pain to have the final say in who I become.

—

But becoming is not simple.
Nobody just wakes up healed.
Nobody becomes patient because they read a quote about patience.
If that worked, the internet would have fixed us by now.
Clearly, it has not.

—

Nobody becomes loving without being tested.
Nobody becomes humble without pride getting exposed.
Nobody becomes honest without facing something uncomfortable.
Growth costs something.
Which is annoying.
But probably true.

—

Maybe real growth is not only about adding things.
Sometimes it is about losing things.
Losing pride.
Losing denial.
Losing the need to always be right.
Losing the version of myself I built to survive but was never meant to become forever.

—

That one is hard.
Because sometimes the version of me that got me through something is not the version of me that can carry me forward.
A wall might help someone survive a storm.
But after the storm, living inside the wall forever starts to look less like safety and more like a prison.

—

Maybe suffering does not get the last word.
It can shape me.
But it does not have to define me.
Pain can leave marks without deciding who I become.

That thought gave me a little room to breathe.
Not a full answer.

Just enough to wonder:
Maybe this is not the end.

—

Sometimes growth happens in ordinary places.
For me, basketball has always been one of them.
Not because it fixes anything, but because it reminds me I am still moving, still learning, still showing up.
Sometimes becoming looks a lot less dramatic than we expect.

—

And then there is my dog.
He greets me with the same enthusiasm whether I have had a great day or a terrible one.
Five minutes after making a mess, he is ready to be friends again.
There is something simple about that.
Life keeps moving forward.
Maybe we can too.

—

Because after suffering, the question is not only:
Why did this happen?
Sometimes the question becomes:
What is this doing to me?
Is it closing me?
Is it hardening me?
Is it making me hate the world?
Or is there still some way for me to become something better on the other side of it?

—

I do not know exactly how that works.
I just know people become.
Slowly.
Usually while doing regular life.
Driving.
Working.
Paying bills.
Making dinner.
Apologizing.
Arguing.
Trying again.
Failing again.

Getting up again.
Walking the dog while wondering why the universe exists.
Normal stuff.

—

Maybe life was never just one thread.
Maybe it was thousands of them.
Pain.
Joy.
Questions.
People.
Choices.
Loss.
Love.
Truth.
All crossing over each other.
All moving at the same time.
And the longer I looked, the harder it became to believe they were all random.
I could not see the whole pattern.
Not yet.
But I was starting to wonder if there was one.
And if there was a pattern...
then maybe there was something holding the threads.

—

And maybe that was part of what I was starting to see.
Becoming does not wait for life to look important.
It happens while life is happening.
In traffic.
In conversations.
In the way I treat people when I am tired.

In the way I respond when I am wrong.
In the way I handle disappointment.
In the way I love when it is inconvenient.
In the way I keep walking when I do not feel like it.

—

Not later.
Not after I finally become somebody.
Now.

—

People talk like they are waiting to become somebody.
After the money.
After the body.
After the relationship.
After the new car.
After the dream job.
After life finally looks the way it is supposed to look.
But that is not how life works.

—

I am somebody now.
Not someday.
Now.
The person I am becoming is not waiting for a future version of my life.
It is being shaped in the one I am living right now.

—

That means the small things matter.
The boring things matter.
The hidden things matter.
The parts of life nobody claps for matter.
Because that is where becoming happens.

—

Maybe that is why this question felt so important.
What exactly are we becoming?
Not as a motivational phrase.
Not as a self-help idea.
As a real question.
Because if life is shaping me every day, then I probably need to pay attention.
Not panic.
Not obsess.
Just notice.

—

What is my pain becoming?
What is my anger becoming?
What is my comfort becoming?
What is my faith becoming?
What is my life becoming?

—

I did not have all the answers.
I still do not.
But I could not shake the feeling that growth was not accidental.
It seemed woven into reality itself.
And if we are growing...
then the next question becomes impossible to avoid.
Toward what?

Chapter 11

Which Way Is the Compass Pointing?
At the beginning, I was asking:
What is going on?
That question made sense then.
I was looking at reality itself.
Existence.
Consciousness.
The universe.
The fact that any of this is happening at all.

—

But after everything I had walked through, the question started to change.
Not completely.
Maybe it was the same question growing up.
Because if something is going on...
if reality is not random...
if truth is actually revealing something...
then I could not only ask what this is.
I had to ask where it was going.
And maybe more personally:
Where am I going?

—

That question felt simple at first.
Almost too simple.
Because most of the time, I think I know where I am going.
I have plans.
I have routines.

I have things to do.
Bills to pay.
Places to be.
People depending on me.

Life has a way of disguising movement as direction.
But those are not always the same thing.

—

I can be moving and still be lost.
I know that because I have done it.
Literally.

—

There are few things more humbling than confidently driving the wrong way.
Especially when my daughter is in the car.
And she is hungry.
That changes the whole situation.

—

Because when a teenager is hungry, time works differently.
Five minutes is not five minutes.
Five minutes is betrayal.
Ten minutes is a personal attack.
Fifteen minutes is when you start wondering if you should call a lawyer.

—

So imagine this.
We are supposed to be going home.
Home means food.
Home means rest.
Home means the place we are supposed to be going.
Simple enough.

—

But I am driving.
Listening to a podcast.
Thinking about something completely unrelated.
Probably something normal like if aliens called “the greys” exist, does that mean there are other colors?
Blues?
Greens?
A rare shiny version?
Normal stuff.

—

And I am on autopilot.
Not paying attention the way I should.
Still driving.
Still moving.
Still confident enough to not question myself.
And then at some point I realize something.
I have been going the wrong way.
Not for thirty seconds.
Not for one turn.
For long enough.
Long enough that now the drive home is not just delayed.
It is basically doubled.

—

That is a terrible realization.
Because now I know the truth.
But my daughter does not know that I know the truth.
And that creates a very delicate legal situation.

—

Because according to her stomach, we should be almost home.
In her mind, food is close.
Relief is close.
The journey is almost over.
But in reality?
No.
In reality, I have added time.
I have added distance.
I have added unnecessary suffering to an already hungry teenager.
And that is dangerous.

—

So now I have options.
I can tell her the truth.
Or I can keep driving and hope she does not notice.
Which is stupid.
Because she is going to notice.
Hungry teenagers notice everything.
They are like detectives with attitude.

—

And the moment I say, “So... funny story,” I already know what happens.
The courtroom opens.
The little judge appears.
She does not need a robe.
She has facial expressions.
She does not need a gavel.
She has silence.
And somehow the back of my head becomes the defendant.

—

Because I know she is staring at it.

I can feel it.
That quiet teenage stare that says:
How did we get here?
Why did I trust you?
How long have you known?
And most importantly:
When am I eating?

—

That is when the drive becomes longer in a different way.
Not just because of the map.
Because now truth is sitting in the car with us.
And it is hungry too.

—

The funny thing is, I was moving the whole time.
The truck was working.
The road was there.
The podcast was playing.
Everything looked normal.
But I was not getting closer.
I was getting farther away.

—

That is the part that stuck with me.
I can be moving and still be lost.
I can be confident and still be wrong.
I can feel like I am making progress and still be adding distance.

—

The problem with the wrong direction is not only that it is wrong.
It is that every minute I stay on it pulls me farther from the direction truth was trying to lead me.

—

But there is another part too.
Because once I realize I am going the wrong way, everything is not ruined.
My daughter is going to be fine.
She is not going to die of starvation.
She is just going to be more cranky.
Possibly much more cranky.
But once I know the truth, the solution is not complicated.
I do not need to panic.
I do not need to pretend.
I do not need to keep driving the wrong direction just because I already spent time on that road.
I just need to turn around.
That is it.
One honest U-turn.
And suddenly I am moving the right way again.

—

That is true in a car.
And honestly, it is true in normal life too.
If I am late to work, pretending I am not late does not help.
If I am on the wrong road, pretending it is the right road does not make the trip shorter.
The honest thing is usually simple.
Turn around.
Make the call.
Tell the truth.
Keep moving.

—

That made me wonder how often the same thing happens in life.
Because movement can be deceiving.

Being busy feels like direction.
Having plans feels like direction.
Making money can feel like direction.
Getting older can feel like direction.
Learning things can feel like direction.
Even changing can feel like direction.
But what if I am moving fast in the wrong direction?
What if I am becoming something...
but not something true?

—

That question matters.
Because by now I had already started asking what I was becoming.
But becoming still needs direction.
A river moves.
A storm moves.
A person running in circles moves.
Movement by itself does not tell me if I am on the right path.

—

And maybe that is why truth matters so much.
Not truth as a slogan.
Not truth as a weapon.
Not truth as the thing people use to win arguments.
Truth as reality.
What is actually true.
The road as it really is.
The map as it really is.
The direction as it really is.

—

Because if I am wrong about the road, confidence will not save me.

If I am wrong about the destination, speed will not save me.
If I am wrong about the direction, motion might only take me farther away.

—

That thought made me quiet.
Not scared exactly.
Just aware.
Because I started realizing that truth does not only answer questions.
Truth gives direction.

—

And if truth gives direction, then ignoring truth is not harmless.
It does something.
Slowly maybe.
Quietly maybe.
But it adds distance.
One choice.
One excuse.
One comfortable lie.
One avoided question.
One mile at a time.

—

That is not me saying every wrong turn ruins everything.
I do not think life works like that.
Sometimes wrong turns teach us.
Sometimes they humble us.
Sometimes they show us something we would not have noticed otherwise.
Sometimes they become part of the story.
But they are still wrong turns.
And eventually, if I want to follow truth, I have to be willing to turn around.

—

That part is not always easy.
Turning around means admitting something.
It means admitting I was wrong.
Or distracted.
Or too confident.
Or too busy listening to whatever was playing in my head to notice where I was actually going.

—

And maybe that is why people stay on wrong roads longer than they need to.
Not because they love being lost.
But because turning around feels like losing.
It feels like wasted time.
It feels like having to explain yourself.
It feels like looking over at a hungry teenager and admitting:
I messed up.
We are not almost there.
We are farther away than I thought.

—

But the truth is still better than pretending.
Because pretending does not make the road shorter.
It just keeps me lost longer.

—

That is where the question started pointing again.
If truth gives direction...
then what am I moving toward?
Not what do I say I believe.
Not what sounds good.
Not what makes me look right.
What am I actually moving toward?

—

Because truth is not just an idea in my head.
It is not just something to think about when life gets quiet.
Truth affects the road.
Truth affects direction.
Truth affects where I end up if I keep going.

—

And maybe that is why this whole journey kept pulling me forward.
Because I was not only looking for answers.
I was looking for direction.
Not just movement.
Not just change.
Not just becoming.
Direction.

—

That is hard to explain without making it sound bigger than I can hold.
Because I do believe there is a Creator.
I do believe truth points somewhere.
I do believe this whole journey is not random.
But I also know this is my journey.
My questions.
My eyes.
My road.
And I cannot force someone else to see what I see.
That was never the point.

—

The point is that if truth is real, then it does not belong only to me.
It cannot.
Truth cannot belong to one language.

One country.
One personality.
One church.
One system.
One person asking questions in his own head.
If something is actually true, then it is true whether I notice it or not.
It is true here.
It is true somewhere else.
It is true for someone whose life looks nothing like mine.
It is true even if they ask the question in a language I do not understand.

—

That thought matters to me.
Because if truth is direction, then maybe the starting point is not the most important thing.
Maybe what matters is whether I am willing to follow where truth leads.
Different lives.
Different roads.
Different languages.
Different stories.
Same reality.
Same truth.

—

And maybe that is why the question of direction matters so much.
Because if I am moving toward truth, then even when I do not understand everything, I am at least moving toward what is real.
But if I am moving away from truth, then it does not matter how confident I feel.
I am still adding distance.

—

That does not mean the road will be simple.

It does not mean I will never get distracted.
Clearly, I get distracted.
I named my dog after a pirate and gave his rabbit enemy a backstory.
So no, I am not pretending I walk in a straight line.

—

But maybe following truth was never about walking perfectly straight.
Maybe it was about noticing when I am off course.
Being honest enough to admit it.
Humble enough to turn around.
And willing enough to keep going.

—

That is where direction started to feel different to me.
Not like a rule.
Not like a cage.
More like a compass.
Something that does not force me to walk.
But tells me when I am facing the right way.

—

And maybe that is what I had been looking for longer than I realized.
Not just answers.
Direction.
Not just movement.
Truth.
Not just becoming.
Becoming toward something real.

—

Because if life is shaping me...
and if truth is revealing something...
and if every road is leading somewhere...

then maybe the question is not only:
Where am I going?
Maybe the question is:
Am I walking toward what is true?

Chapter 12

What Am I Here For?
Am I walking toward what is true?
That question stayed with me.
Not like a stop sign.
More like a compass that would not stop turning in my hand.
Because once I started thinking about direction, another question came with it.
A quieter one.
But somehow heavier.

—

What am I here for?

—

Not what is going on?
That was where this started.
That was the first version of the question.
The wide-eyed version.
The staring-at-the-universe version.
The what-in-the-world-is-any-of-this version.
And honestly, I still think that is a fair question.
We are conscious creatures flying through space on a rock.
That should probably bother us a little.
At least enough to look up from our phones every once in a while and say:
Wait.
What?

—

But the question had grown.
Or maybe I had.

Not fully.
Let’s not get carried away.
I still think tables might be suspicious.
I still wonder if aliens have their own conspiracy theories about us.
Like maybe somewhere out there, some alien is sitting in a weird chair, wearing whatever their version of a tinfoil hat is, saying:
“I’m telling you, the humans are real.”
And all the other aliens are like:
“Gary, please stop. You’re scaring the children.”

—

So no, I was not suddenly some perfectly mature philosopher sitting on a mountain.
I was still me.
But the questions were different now.
They had more weight.
More shape.
More direction.
Less like random sparks flying everywhere.
More like threads.
Thin ones.
Faint ones.
But still there.

—

I could not see the whole picture.
I am human.
That matters.
Not because truth is small.
Because I am.

—

That thought made me quieter.

In a good way.
Because the more I looked, the more I realized that being small does not make the search pointless.
It makes humility necessary.
Maybe I was not meant to hold the whole picture in my hands.
Maybe I was only meant to follow what had been shown.
One thread.
One question.
One step.

—

And somewhere in that, the question became personal again.
What am I here for?

—

That question can get weird fast.
Because when people talk about purpose, it can start sounding like everybody needs to discover some giant life mission.
Like if you do not have a five-year plan, a morning routine, a dream board, a podcast, a brand, and a water bottle with motivational lines printed down the side, you are failing at existence.
Drink water by 9 a.m.
Believe in yourself by 10.
Conquer your destiny by noon.
Take a picture of it by 1.
Post it by 2.
Then pretend you are not tired by 3.

—

That kind of purpose makes me want to lie down for a while.
And honestly, if it is winter and the sun already went down, I might.
Because maybe my body knows something my calendar forgot.

—

But that was not the kind of purpose I meant.
I was not asking what career would make me impressive.
I was not asking what title would make people respect me.
I was not asking what version of myself would look best from the outside.
I was asking something underneath all of that.
Something quieter.
Something older.

—

If I was created...
what does that mean?

—

Not as a slogan.
Not as a religious answer I am supposed to repeat.
As a real question.
Because I did not create myself.
I did not choose to exist.
I did not design consciousness, love, longing, guilt, wonder, or the strange ache that keeps asking if there is something more.
I woke up inside all of it.
Already alive.
Already searching.
Already capable of missing the point.
That is strange.
And beautiful.
And terrifying.
And very inconvenient when I am just trying to have a normal Tuesday.

—

But there it was.
If I did not create myself, then maybe I do not get to invent myself from nothing either.

Maybe there is something true about me before I achieve anything.
Before I prove anything.
Before I become impressive.
Before anyone sees the work.
Before anyone understands what it cost.

—

That thought hit me differently when I thought about being a dad.
Because being a dad is one of those things that sounds simple until you are actually doing it.
Then you realize it is a thousand invisible things.
Things your kid might never notice.
Things nobody claps for.
Things that do not look important from the outside.
Driving.
Paying.
Showing up.
Worrying.
Trying not to react wrong when you are tired.
Trying to listen when you already have ten things on your mind.
Trying to be steady when you do not feel steady.
Trying to love them well even when they are mad at you.
Trying to be honest.
Trying to be dependable.
Not perfect.
Just real.

—

And that is harder than it sounds.
Because love is not always a feeling with soft music behind it.
Sometimes love is boring.

Sometimes love is inconvenient.
Sometimes love is doing the thing anyway.
Sometimes love is being misunderstood and still choosing what is best.
Sometimes love is sitting in the car with a hungry teenager who is silently judging the back of your head because you missed a turn.
Again.
Hypothetically.

—

But that is where I started seeing something.
Purpose might not always announce itself.
Maybe it does not always feel huge.
Maybe sometimes it looks like ordinary faithfulness.
The hidden kind.
The kind no one sees.
The kind that makes you ask who you are becoming when nobody is watching.

—

That question felt different from chasing a dream.
It was not loud.
It was not flashy.
It did not need a stage.
It was more honest than that.
Because character is built in the small things.
In how we love the people in front of us.
In whether we tell the truth when it costs us something.

—

That is where purpose started to feel less like pressure.
And more like invitation.
Not force.
Not control.

Not someone grabbing me by the back of the neck and dragging me down a road.
Invitation.
A call.
A direction.
Something saying:
This way.
Not because I have no choice.
But because the choice matters.

—

That distinction matters to me.
Because I do not believe being created means I am a robot.
I do not believe design means I am trapped.
A river has banks, but it still moves.
A bird has wings, but it still has to fly.
A person can be made for truth and still choose a lie.
That is part of what makes this so serious.
And so human.

—

Truth does not have to force me to follow it.
It just is.
I can ignore it.
I can fight it.
I can explain it away.
I can build a whole life trying not to look at it.
But reality does not disappear because I am not ready.
It waits.
Steady.
Like light under a door.
Like a thread I keep finding again.

Like a compass that still points even when I am tired of walking.

—

And maybe that is what I was starting to see.
Not clearly.
Not completely.
But enough.
The questions were connected.
The wrong turns were connected.
The suffering was connected.
The laughter was connected.
Not in a way I could fully explain.
More like I could finally see faint lines running between things I used to think were separate.
Almost like the whole journey had been quietly stitching itself together while I was busy asking what was going on.

—

I still could not see the whole pattern.
But I could see enough to know there was one.

—

And that made me wonder if purpose is not something I have to chase like it is hiding from me.
Maybe it is something I notice as I become more honest.
Maybe it is not found by pretending to be someone else.
Maybe it is found by becoming more fully myself.
Honest before God.
Honest before people.
Honest when nobody is looking.
Honest when it is uncomfortable.
Honest when it would be easier to perform.

—

That does not mean I can tell someone else exactly what they are here for.
I cannot.
I can barely untangle my own life.
I am not qualified to reverse engineer someone else’s soul.
That sounds like a bad idea.
Like something that should require a license.
Or at least a helmet.

—

But maybe I do not need to answer it for everybody.
Maybe I just need to be honest enough to keep following it in my own life.
Not as a puzzle to solve.
As a way of becoming.

—

And maybe the answer does not arrive all at once.
Maybe it comes in pieces.
In the people I am responsible for.
In the realities I refuse to run from.
In the love I am learning to give.
In the wrong roads I finally turn around from.
In the quiet moments where I choose what is right even when nobody else knows.

—

Maybe I was not made just to survive.
Maybe I was not made just to consume, achieve, sleep, work, repeat, and die.
Maybe I was made to become alive in a way I still barely understand.
More honest.
More humble.
More loving.
More awake.

More willing to follow truth wherever it leads.

—

And maybe that is why the question felt so important.
Because purpose cannot be separated from who I am becoming.
And who I am becoming cannot be separated from what I believe is real.
It is all connected.
The road.
The compass.
The threads.
The light under the door.
The people I love.
The Creator I cannot fully explain.
The life I did not give myself.
All of it.

—

I did not have the whole answer.
I still do not.
But the question had changed me.
Because once I started taking purpose seriously, I could not hide behind movement anymore.
I could not hide behind busyness.
I could not hide behind being useful.
I had to let the search reach deeper than that.
Not just:
What am I doing?
Not just:
Where am I going?
But something underneath both.

—

Who is walking?
Who is choosing?
Who is becoming?
Who is hiding?
Who am I when all the noise is gone?

—

If I am here for something...
then maybe I cannot avoid the next question.
Not just:
Who am I?
But something more honest than that.
Who am I really?

Chapter 13

Who Is Holding the Compass?
Who am I really?
That question did not walk in politely.
It came through a portal.
Which sounds ridiculous.
But by this point, ridiculous had started feeling strangely normal.

—

I could be sitting in my apartment right now.
My daughter in her room.
The world outside doing whatever the world does.
This book open in front of me.
Then suddenly, right beside me, the air splits open.
A glowing doorway.
A tear in reality.
A portal humming like the universe just unzipped itself.
And honestly?
I think I would walk through it.

—

Not because that would be smart.
Let’s be very clear about that.
Walking through a random portal in your apartment is not exactly rational decision-making.
But if one opened beside me, glowing like reality had split itself open, I would have questions.
A lot of questions.
Like:
Did this open for me?

Is it safe?
Do I need shoes?
And is the other side just the Bermuda Triangle?

—

But even with all those questions...
I think I would walk through.

—

Not because I understand portals.
I do not.
I have never seen one.
At least not that I know of.
Maybe the government has.
Maybe they have one locked in a warehouse somewhere next to the aliens, the real history books, and the original Apollo tapes NASA somehow taped over.
I do not know.

—

But the portal was not the strangest part anymore.
The strangest part was realizing I had been living inside a mystery the whole time and calling it normal.
So if a doorway opened now, I think I would look.
And if the compass pointed through it?
I would go.

—

So I did.
At least, that is how it felt.
Not in my apartment.
On the ship.
In the middle of the storm.
One step toward the light.

One step toward the thing I could not explain.
One step toward the place the compass was pointing.
And the second I got close, the world changed.

—

I was still on the ship.
The storm was still moving.
The compass was still in my hand.
But the portal was open now.
Not just glowing.
Open.
Like a doorway cut into the middle of the rain.
And beyond it was not another physical place so much as another layer of the journey.
The ship remained beneath my feet.
The storm remained around me.
But what I stepped into felt like the landscape of my own soul.
The kind of place where the sky does not have to decide what color it wants to be.
The kind of place where the ocean can hang above you and the stars can look close enough to touch.
The kind of place where a person should probably ask more questions before walking in.
But again.
Here we are.

—

I thought the portal would show me another world.
And in a way, it did.
But not the way I expected.
It was not only stars and strange skies and floating islands, although honestly, there may have been some of that too.
It was more like stepping through the storm and into a world built out of everything I had ever carried.

—

Masks hung in the air like old armor.
Names floated above me like character titles.
Memories moved around like shadows.
Old wounds were stacked like cargo crates on the deck.
Versions of myself stood in the distance like abandoned avatars.
The dad.
The worker.
The funny one.
The confident one.
The favorite child.
Hey, I do not make the rules.
I am just writing the book.
And somewhere behind all of those versions...
the one who acted like he was fine.
And the one who knew he was not.

—

In the middle of all of it, the compass was still in my hand.
Pointing.
Not at a place.
At me.

—

That was the part I did not expect.
I thought the portal would show me where to go next.
Instead, it showed me who was trying to go.
Not like a mirror.
A mirror only shows the outside.
This was different.
This showed the costume.
The cargo.

The mask.
The things I had carried so long they started looking like skin.
And underneath all of that, something was still there.
Not finished.
Not perfect.
But created.
Still worth telling the truth about.

—

Who is holding the compass?
That was the real question.
Not where is it pointing.
Not why am I on the ship.
Who is holding it?
Me.
The person choosing.
The person hiding.
The person following.
The person pretending.
The person becoming.

—

My name is Pierce.
I am a dad.
I work.
I write.
I ask too many questions.
I make jokes at weird times.
I overthink things that probably did not ask to be overthought.
I have a fascination with the idea of aliens, even though most days I probably do not think they are real.

All of that is true.
But standing there, inside that world, surrounded by every version of myself I had ever carried, I had to ask:
Is that me?
Or is that just information about me?

—

A captain can wear the coat.
Stand at the front of the ship.
Hold the compass.
Look serious into the wind.
Maybe even say something bold like:
“We sail at dawn.”
Which sounds great until someone asks where we are sailing, and I realize I only said it because it sounded cool.
Now everybody is awake early for no reason.
Bad captain moment.
Not Captain Jack Sparrow.
My dog.
He is precious and perfect and has never made a bad decision in his life.
Except the trash thing.
But we are not talking about that right now.

—

The outfit does not make the captain.
The title does not make the captain.
Even holding the compass does not mean I know who I am.
It only means I am responsible for what I do with it.

—

That hit me.
Hard.

Because there they were.
All the things I had mistaken for identity.
Roles.
Titles.
Mistakes.
Strengths.
Wounds.
What people thought of me.
What I wanted people to think of me.
All floating around like pieces of a character I had been trying to play.
Some were real.
Some were useful.
Some had helped me survive.
But none of them were the whole thing.

—

It was like opening an inventory screen in a video game.
Item after item.
Dad.
Worker.
Friend.
Son.
Question-asker.
Overthinker.
Believer.
Sinner.
Dreamer.
Holder of the compass.
Possible portal walker.
All of it sitting there like:

Here.
This is your character.
But even then, I had to ask:
Is that who I am?
Or is that just what I am carrying?

—

Pain can become something I carry.
So can fear.
So can pride.
So can shame.
So can success.

Carry something long enough, and eventually it starts to feel like skin.
Like it was always there.
Like it is me.
But maybe some of what I called identity was just cargo.
Heavy cargo.
Old cargo.
Stuff I picked up somewhere and forgot I was allowed to put down.

—

And in that strange world, I could see it.
The cargo.
The masks.
The old versions of me.
The costume I wore when I wanted to look fine.
The confidence I used when I did not want to admit I was confused.
The jokes I made when honesty would have cost more.
The parts of me I had edited, covered, filtered, and arranged so they could survive the room.

—

Real starts to feel rare in a world full of filters.
And I was not only looking for it out there.
I was looking for it in myself.

—

The mask got heavier.
The character screen looked incomplete.
The portal glowed brighter.
The compass kept pointing.
And I finally understood.
The point was not:
Look how fake I am.
The point was:
What is still true underneath it?

—

I had performed.
I had hidden.
I had tried to look stronger than I felt.
I had acted like I knew where I was going while quietly checking the compass every five seconds.
And still...
none of that meant I was worthless.
It meant I was human.
Flawed.
Scared sometimes.
Trying.
Created.
Still worth telling the truth about.

—

Still worth telling the truth about.

That line stayed with me.
Shame says:
If they knew the real you, you would be done.
Truth says:
Let us start with the real you.

—

So maybe I did not have to keep pretending I was less broken than I was.
And maybe I did not have to keep believing I was only broken.
Maybe I could tell the truth about the cracks without believing the cracks were the end of the story.

—

There is a Japanese art called kintsugi.
Broken pottery is repaired with gold.
The cracks do not disappear.
They become part of the beauty.
Not because the bowl was never broken.
Because the repair tells the truth.

—

And that is when the color started to show up.
Not all at once.
Not like everything was suddenly fixed.
More like the world around me had been waiting for honesty before it revealed the next layer.
A little gold in the cracks.
A little light under the surface.
A little color where shame told me there would only be damage.

—

I was not the light.
I was not the source.

I was not the full color.
But maybe I could reflect some of it.
Like a cracked mirror still catching part of the sun.
Like broken pottery lined with gold.
Like something created, damaged, repaired, and still beautiful enough to tell the truth.

—

Then everything started clicking faster.
The compass.
The portal.
The mask.
The ship.
The storm.
The questions.
The light.
All of it started firing at once.
Not neatly.
Not slowly.
More like light pouring through a doorway.
Like the whole horizon had been dim for so long, and now the portal kept opening wider.
One step.
Then another.
Then another.
Until the light was not just around me anymore.
It was passing through me.
Warm.
Bright.
Safe.
Not safe like nothing bad could ever happen.
Safe like being known and not thrown away.

Like a child reaching for their dad without wondering if his arms will be there.
Like being seen before you learned how to hide.
And suddenly I could not pretend I was standing in the dark anymore.

—

I still could not see everything.
I am human.
That matters.
Not because truth is small.
Because I am.

—

But I could see enough.
Enough to know something in me was responding to the compass.
Like hunger responding to food.
Like thirst responding to water.
Like something deep inside me recognizing truth before I could fully explain it.
Enough to know when I was facing the wrong way.
Enough to ache for something more.

—

That is the strange part.
I can see the compass and still ignore it.
I can know the better thing and still choose the worse thing.
I can want honesty and still hide.
I can want love and still be selfish.
I can want truth and still reach for comfort.
I am not only lost when I do not know.
Sometimes I am lost when I do know.
And I walk the other way anyway.

—

So who am I really?

I am not only my best moments.
I am not only my worst ones.
I am not only what I have done.
I am not only what has been done to me.
I am not only the role I play.
I am not only the mask I wear.
I am not only the storm I am standing in.

—

I am created.
I am flawed.
I am responsible.
I am loved more than I understand.
I am smaller than I want to admit.
And somehow still more valuable than I usually believe.

—

Small and valuable.
Flawed and loved.
Responsible and unfinished.
Capable of truth.
Capable of lies.
Able to hold the compass.
Able to ignore it.
Able to turn around.
Able to keep sailing.
Able, apparently, to consider walking through portals with questionable safety standards.

—

Maybe identity is hard because I want it to be simple.
One clean answer.
One label.

One sentence.
One character profile.
Strength: curiosity.
Weakness: spiders.
Biggest fear: also spiders.
Special ability: overthinking that I am pretty sure, mathematically, there are enough spiders on this planet to consume every human alive if they all decided to turn on us at the same time...
Inventory: spider repellent.
Extra-large spider repellent.
Backup spider repellent.
A note reminding me to buy more spider repellent.
But behind all the spider repellent...
there was the compass.
Still there.
Still warm.
Still pointing.
And for a second, that stopped me.
Because maybe I had never been as alone as I thought.
Maybe even in the dark, even when I could not see the next step, something had been pulling me toward truth the whole time.
Not loud.
Not forced.
Not controlling me.
Just steady.
Like something placed deep inside me that knew north before I did.
And maybe that was the strange thing about the compass.
If I ignored it, the world stayed dark.
But if I trusted it...
if I held it close and followed where it pointed...

even if the whole universe turned its lights off...
the compass still knew the way.
And somehow, the more I followed it, the more it seemed to glow.
Not because I understood everything.
Not because the darkness disappeared.
But because truth has a way of lighting the space around your next step.

—

But real identity is deeper than a character sheet.
It is not just what I carry.
It is who I am becoming as I carry it.

—

And that was enough.
Not enough to answer everything.
Enough to move.
The compass was still pointing.
The storm was still alive.
The portal was still open.
The mask had started coming off.
And I was standing there with hands that were not as steady as I wanted them to be.
But I was holding the compass anyway.

—

Then the world shifted again.
Not because I left the ship behind.
Because the inner world the portal had revealed began folding back into the storm around me.
The crossing had done its work.
The masks.
The cargo.
The questions.

They were no longer floating in some separate place.
I could see them in relation to the voyage itself.
Once I stopped hiding from who I was...
I could not look at reality the same way anymore.
The mask was coming off.
The compass was pointing.
The storm was moving.
And somewhere ahead, beyond the rain and beyond the portal's fading glow, I could almost see something.
Not clearly.
Not fully.
But enough to ask:
What am I seeing now?

Chapter 14

What Am I Seeing Now?
More than I expected.
I thought stepping through the portal would make everything clearer.
And in some ways, it did.
But not simpler.
Definitely not simpler.

—

The storm did not disappear.
The ship did not vanish.
The compass did not stop pulling against my hands.
But the world around me changed.
Or maybe I changed.
Honestly, I am still not sure which one happened first.

—

The rain kept falling, but now every drop caught light.
Not just white light.
Color.
Gold.
Blue.
Green.
Purple.
Colors I had names for.
Colors I did not.
Colors that felt like they were trying to say something before I knew how to hear them.

—

The ocean moved beneath the ship.

The sky moved above it.
The stars looked too close.
The clouds looked alive.
The whole world felt sharper.
Like I had been staring at reality through a dirty window my whole life, and now someone had wiped part of it clean.
Not all of it.
Just enough to bother me.
In a good way.

—

Because once you see even a little more clearly, ordinary things stop looking ordinary.
That is the problem.
Or maybe that is the gift.
Maybe both.

—

The compass pulled.
The ship turned.
The storm opened.
And suddenly I was not only seeing a fantasy world.
I was seeing the real world through it.
That was the strange part.
The portal had not taken me away from reality.
It had made reality harder to ignore.

—

Fire flickered on the deck.
I do not know where it came from.
Maybe a lantern.
Maybe the ship.
Maybe the story needed better lighting.

I am not asking too many questions about that part.
But I stared at the flame, and for a second, it looked impossible.
Actual fire.
A little piece of heat and light dancing in the air like it had somewhere to be.
We act like fire is normal because we have seen it before.
But is it?
Really?
A thing can burn.
Glow.
Warm your hands.
Light a room.
Destroy a forest.
Turn wood into smoke.
Turn darkness into shapes.
I am sure ancient people looked at fire like it was a god.
Honestly, I understand why.
If you stare at it long enough, it almost feels like it is speaking.
Not with words.
With movement.
Like it knows something old.
Like it has been here longer than us and is trying to tell us something.
Not because fire is God.
But because fire is creation too.

—

Fire is basically magic we stopped being impressed by.
And maybe a lot of life is like that.
Not less strange because it is real.
More strange because it is real.

—

The compass kept pulling, and the world kept shifting.
The ship sailed through scenes that felt like dreams, memories, and questions all stitched together.
One moment, I saw mountains rising out of the ocean.
The next, I saw a canyon so wide it made my chest feel small.
Not small in a bad way.
Small in the way you feel when beauty is too big for your body.
Like standing at the edge of something ancient and realizing your problems are real... but they are not the whole world.

—

That kind of beauty does something to people.
A sunset can stop a conversation.
A song can bring back a memory you thought was gone.
A child laughing can change the whole mood of a room.
Someone getting the moment they have dreamed about for years can make strangers cry on a couch.
People will sit there watching some random person's dream come true on a talent show and suddenly everybody is emotional.
Why?
We do not know them.
We did not practice with them.
We did not pay for the singing lessons.
And yet something in us recognizes it.
Like joy has a language deeper than explanation.

—

That is strange.
Beautiful.
But strange.

—

And then there is love.

Do not even get me started on love.
Actually, too late.
We are here.
Love might be the strangest thing in the whole world.
A person can meet another person, and suddenly their brain starts acting like it was hacked by a poet with bad judgment.
You see someone cute enough, and all logic starts leaving the building.
You start smiling at your phone like an idiot.
You reread messages.
You overthink punctuation.
They say, "haha," and now you are trying to figure out if it means regular haha or meaningful haha.
That is not science.
That is a spell.
I do not care what anyone says.

—

And yes, I know there are chemicals involved.
Dopamine.
Oxytocin.
All of that.
I believe you.
But naming the chemicals does not make it less weird.
That is like saying a sunset is just light scattering in the atmosphere.
Okay.
Sure.
But also look at it.

—

Sometimes explanations help.
Sometimes they accidentally make the mystery bigger.

—

That kept happening.
Everywhere I looked, the world felt less normal than before.
The stars.
The ocean.
The body.
The mind.
Dreams.
Memory.
Time.
Gravity.
Consciousness.
All of it.

—

We are walking around inside bodies made of atoms, standing on a spinning planet, flying through space, having thoughts we cannot even fully explain.
And somehow we still manage to be annoyed when the Wi-Fi is slow.
Which, to be fair, is reasonable.
But still.

—

Maybe I was seeing what had always been there.
Maybe the world had not become stranger.
Maybe I had just stopped dulling it down.

—

Because every explanation for existence is strange when you actually think about it.
God.
No God.
A Creator outside time.
A universe from nothing.

Life from non-life.
Consciousness from matter.
A soul.
No soul.
Evolution.
The Big Bang.
Multiverse.
Simulation.
Aliens.
No aliens.
Whatever answer someone wants to bring to the table, it gets weird fast if you strip away the familiarity.

—

That does not mean every answer is equally true.
That matters.
A lot.
Some foundations hold.
Some foundations crack.
Some ideas sound interesting for about five minutes and then fall apart the moment you start asking real questions.
Flat Earth, for example, sounds like a fun rabbit hole.
Then the foundation starts wobbling so hard you can almost hear it.
Now, maybe tomorrow some new information comes out and proves me wrong.
Maybe the flat earthers throw a parade and I have to apologize.
But as of right now?
I am pretty comfortable saying the earth is round.

—

Still, I understand the impulse.
Not the conclusion.

The impulse.
People sense that reality is stranger than we are told to notice.
So they start pulling threads.
Some pull carefully.
Some pull so hard they rip the whole sweater off and start yelling about Antarctica.
And suddenly you are three videos deep, wondering how you got there.

—

I get it.
I have done my fair share of investigating on YouTube and Twitter.
Or X.
Whatever we are calling it now.
The point is, I have spent plenty of time in those rabbit holes.
Maybe wasted is the wrong word.
Maybe one question opened another door.
Maybe it was a complete waste of time.
Honestly, both are possible.

—

My brain does that too.
One question becomes three.
Three becomes ten.
Ten becomes:
Wait.
Who built that?
Why did they hide it?
Why does that symbol look familiar?
What is under the ocean?
Why are billionaires interested in space?
What is the government not telling us?
And why does every ancient statue look like it knows something?

—

That does not mean the rabbit hole is true.
But it does mean people are searching.
Sometimes badly.
Sometimes wildly.
Sometimes with zero evidence and way too much confidence.
But searching.

—

The Anunnaki.
Yes, the Anunnaki.
Some of you know exactly what rabbit hole that is.
The rest of you can look it up later.
Not now.
Stay with me.

—

Lost civilizations.
Ancient technology.
The pyramids.
Giants.
Aliens under the ocean.
Antarctica.
Simulation theory.
Dreams being more than dreams.
The moon.
Artificial intelligence starting to talk back like it has been waiting for us to ask the right question.
At some point, the internet starts feeling less like a search engine and more like a cursed library run by raccoons.
There might be treasure in there.

But a lot of the time, you open the treasure chest and it just throws a pie in your face.
Then laughs at you.

—

And I am not saying I believe all of it.
I do not.
Some of it is probably nonsense.
Some of it is definitely nonsense.
Some of it is fun nonsense.
Which is a category I respect.
But underneath the noise, there is something real.
A question.
Why does the world feel like it has layers?
Why does reality feel bigger than the version we are handed on a normal Tuesday?
Why do people keep sensing there is more?

—

Maybe because there is.
Not every rumor.
Not every theory.
Not every video made by a guy whispering over dramatic music.
But more.
More depth.
More mystery.
More truth.
More than the flat, boring version of life we sometimes settle for.

—

The ship moved faster.
The water below became darker.
Then lighter.
Then clear enough that I could see stars reflected underneath us.

For a second, I could not tell if we were sailing on water or through space.
Which seems like something I should have been more concerned about.
But honestly, after the portal, the masks, the spiders, and the questionable safety standards, I was adapting.
Growth.
Probably.

—

The compass pulsed in my hands.
Not loud.
But steady.
Like a heartbeat.
And every time it pulsed, another part of the world lit up.
I saw a black hole bending light around itself like reality had soft edges.
I saw numbers turning into patterns.
I saw machines thinking faster than I could blink.
I saw tiny particles behaving like they had read the rules and decided to be difficult anyway.
Quantum anything already sounds fake.
Quantum computing sounds like a wizard wrote math while drinking coffee at three in the morning.
And somehow, it is real.
Or real enough that very smart people are working on it, which is usually my cue to nod respectfully and not ask follow-up questions I am not prepared to understand.

—

The point is not that I understood all of it.
I did not.
The point is that I was finally letting myself be amazed.
That mattered.
Because somewhere along the way, growing up can make wonder feel childish.
Like being impressed by existence is something you are supposed to grow out of.

But I do not think that is maturity.
I think sometimes that is numbness wearing adult clothes.

—

Kids get it.
A kid can find a rock and act like they discovered treasure.
A stick becomes a sword.
A blanket becomes a cape.
A cardboard box becomes a spaceship.
Meanwhile, adults are standing there thinking about bills and back pain and whether the chicken in the fridge is still good.
Which is fair.
Food poisoning is real.
But still.
Maybe kids are not making the world magical.
Maybe they are seeing the magic we learned to ignore.

—

That thought hit me harder than I expected.
Because the portal did not feel like it was giving me a fake world.
It felt like it was giving me permission to see the real one.
Not as less serious.
As more alive.

—

The fire was still fire.
The ocean was still ocean.
The storm was still storm.
Pain was still pain.
Truth was still truth.
But everything had depth now.
Everything had weight.

Everything had color.
The world had not become a cartoon.
It had become more real.

—

Maybe that is what happens when the compass keeps leading you.
Not away from reality.
Deeper into it.
Past the surface.
Past the noise.
Past the version of life that only asks:
What do I need to do today?
And into the version that asks:
What is this?
Why does it exist?
What does it mean?
What am I supposed to see?

—

That question followed me across the deck.
What am I supposed to see?
The ship cut through the glowing water.
The portal behind me faded, but the color stayed.
Not as bright.
Not as overwhelming.
But still there.
Like my eyes had adjusted and could not fully go back.

—

I looked at my hands.
Same hands.
Same scars.

Same skin.
Same person.
But not exactly the same.
Something had shifted.
Not because I had become someone else.
Because I was starting to see what had been true underneath the whole time.
I was created.
Flawed.
Loved.
Responsible.
Unfinished.
And awake enough now to notice the world was not dead around me.
It was speaking.
Not with words.
With beauty.
With order.
With mystery.
With longing.
With questions.
With truth.

—

And maybe reality itself was more like a story than I had realized.
Not fake.
Not pretend.
A real story.
One with layers.
One with symbols.
One with shadows and light.
One where ordinary things can carry more meaning than they seem to carry.

A storm is not only weather.
A road is not only pavement.
A door is not only wood.
A meal is not only food.
A father's arms are not only arms.
A compass is not only an object.
And maybe a life is not only a life.
Maybe it is a journey.
Maybe it is a question.
Maybe it is an invitation.

—

That word again.
Invitation.
Not force.
Not control.
Not a hand crushing my freedom.
More like light through a doorway.
More like a voice saying:
Look closer.
Come farther.
Keep going.

—

And the more I looked, the more I understood something.
The fantasy world was not replacing the real world.

It was helping me see it.
That was the twist.
The ship.
The storm.
The portal.

The masks.
The compass.
The colors.
All of it felt made up.
And it was.
But somehow it was telling the truth.
Maybe that is what story does when it is working.
It takes something too big to hold directly and gives it a shape you can carry.

—

I could have said:
Reality is mysterious.
Truth matters.
Identity matters.
The world is beautiful and broken.
People are searching.
There is more going on than we usually notice.
And all of that would be true.
But sometimes truth needs a ship.
Sometimes truth needs a storm.
Sometimes truth needs a portal.
Sometimes truth needs a ridiculous inventory screen with too much spider repellent.
Because apparently that is the only way my brain knows how to process the universe.

—

And honestly?
I am okay with that.
Because maybe imagination is not the enemy of truth.
Maybe imagination is one of the ways truth wakes us up.
Not every imagination.
Not every story.

Not every wild idea.
But the kind that makes reality feel deeper when you return to it.
The kind that makes you look at your own life and think:
Wait.
What if I have been standing inside something bigger than I realized?

—

That was what I was seeing now.
Not every answer.
Not the full picture.
But depth.
Wonder.
Color.
A world that had been whispering underneath the noise.
A world that was not ordinary just because I was used to it.
A world where fire was magic.
Love was mystery.
Science was stranger than fiction.
Conspiracy rabbit holes were mostly dangerous raccoon libraries.
And truth still stood underneath all of it.
Steady.
Unmoved.
Waiting to be followed.

—

The compass pulled again.
Harder this time.
The ship turned toward the brightest part of the storm.
Which feels like a terrible sailing strategy.
But at this point, I had already walked through a portal and admitted spiders might be organizing.

So who was I to question the compass now?

—

Ahead of me, the sky opened.
Not fully.
Just a crack.
Light spilled through it.
Huge.
Bright.
Alive.
Like the whole horizon was becoming a doorway.
And for a second, every question I had asked seemed to gather around me.
What is going on?
What are we doing here?
Why do we keep searching?
What are we looking for?
What do we actually know?
Why do we believe what we believe?
Why do we lie to ourselves?
Where is truth leading?
Why does the world look like this?
What are we becoming?
Where am I going?
What am I here for?
Who am I really?
What am I seeing now?

—

They were not separate anymore.
They were steps.
Every one of them.

And now they were all pointing forward.

—

I gripped the compass tighter.
The ship rose with the wave.
The light widened.
The storm pulled back like a curtain.
And for the first time, I wondered if maybe the journey had never been only about what I could see.
Maybe it was about whether I would follow the light once I saw it.

—

The compass burned warm in my hands.
The horizon opened wider.
And the question changed again.
Not quieter.
Not smaller.
Bigger.
Like the whole world was asking it with me.
If I can see the light now...
will I follow it?

Chapter 15

Through My Eyes
If I can see the light now...
will I follow it?
That question did not feel like the others.
It was not bigger.
It was not more complicated.
It was simpler.
And somehow that made it harder to avoid.

—

The ship rose with the wave.
The compass burned warm in my hands.
The storm pulled back like a curtain.
And ahead of me, the horizon opened.
Not like a sunrise.
Bigger than that.
Like the sky itself had become a doorway.
Like the world was holding its breath.
Like everything I had been searching for was standing on the other side of the light.

—

I gripped the compass with both hands.
Not casually.
Not like I was holding an object.
Like I was holding the only thing that had ever pointed me home.
The only thing that kept pointing when I was confused.
The only thing that stayed steady when I was not.
The only thing that seemed to know the way before I did.

—

And for the first time, I stopped asking it to explain everything.
I stopped needing the whole map.
I stopped demanding that the storm make sense before I took another step.
I just held the compass close.
Closed my eyes.
And stepped forward.

—

For a moment, it felt like falling.
That should have scared me.
Maybe it would have before.
But this was different.
I was not falling into darkness.
I was falling into light.
Not cold light.
Not empty light.
Warm light.
Safe light.
The kind that does not just shine on you.
It receives you.

—

Like being a child again.
Before you learned how to hide.
Before you learned how to perform.
Before you learned how to explain why you were worth loving.
Like reaching for your father and not wondering if his arms would be there.
They just were.

—

That is the closest way I know how to say it.

Home.
Not a house.
Not a street.
Not a place on a map.
Home like being known.
Home like being safe.
Home like finally setting down something you forgot you were carrying.
Home like realizing the invitation had been there longer than you knew.

—

And I do not want to over-explain that.
Some moments are not meant to be taken apart too much.
Some things are understood better when you let them be felt.
So I will just say this:
I had spent so much of my life asking where truth was leading.
And when I finally trusted it enough to step forward...
it did not feel like losing myself.
It felt like coming home.

—

The compass grew still.
Not dead.
Still.
Like its work had not ended, but something had settled.
Like it had brought me to the place it had been pointing all along.
The storm was still behind me.
The questions were still real.
The road had not been erased.
But something in me was different now.
Not finished.
Not perfect.

But held.

—

And maybe that was the ending I had been looking for.
Not every answer.
Not every explanation.
Not a perfect life tied up neatly with a bow.
Just this:
The light was real.
The compass had been faithful.
The invitation had been open.
And I had finally stepped through.

—

For a moment, I thought that was the end of the story.
My questions.
My storm.
My ship.
My compass.
My road.
My eyes.
All of it had led here.
To light.
To trust.
To home.
And honestly, that would have been a good ending.
A clean ending.

The kind where the music rises, the camera pulls back, and everyone finally gets to breathe again.

—

But then something strange happened.

The light softened.
The storm faded.
The ship became quiet.
The compass rested in my hands.
And the page turned.

—

Not in the sky.
Not on the ship.
Here.
In front of you.

—

A blank page.
Waiting.
At first I thought it was mine.
Another question.
Another chapter.
Another road I was supposed to walk.
But then I looked closer.
And realized the pen was not in my hand anymore.
It was in yours.

—

That is when the story changed.
Not loudly.
Not with thunder.
Not with some dramatic voice from the clouds.
Just quietly.
Almost gently.
Like the book had been passing you the compass the whole time and you did not realize it until now.

—

Because this was never only about me.
It started that way.
My questions.
My strange thoughts.
My fish.
My road.
My storm.
My portal.
My eyes.
But if anything in these pages stirred something in you...
if any question followed you longer than you expected...
if any line made you pause...
then maybe the compass was not only in my hand.
Maybe something in you has been pointing too.

—

I cannot tell you what your first step is.
I cannot answer every question for you.
I cannot walk your road.
I cannot force you toward truth.
And honestly, I would not want to.
That is not how truth works.
That is not how invitation works.

—

All I can do is tell you what I saw.
This is my journey.
My questions.
My story.
This is how the world looked through my eyes.

But your eyes are open now too.
And there is a blank page in front of you.
So before the noise comes back...
before life gets busy again...
before you close this and go back to pretending the questions are not there...
pause.
Look around.
Be honest.
The pen is in your hand now.
What is your first question?

Farewell Letter

Dear Fellow Traveler,

If you've made it this far, thank you. Seriously.

I never planned on writing a book. Honestly, I was just trying to write down some thoughts and questions before I forgot them.

Somewhere along the way, those notes turned into a book. And somewhere along the way, I realized these aren't really my questions. They're human questions. I just happened to write down my journey through them.

Maybe you agreed with me. Maybe you didn't. That's okay.

The point was never for you to think exactly like I do. The point was to ask honest questions and follow the truth wherever it leads.

This book is free. Think of it as a small gift from me to you.

Somewhere along the way, I realized this book didn't really feel like mine anymore. So the best thing I could think to do with it was give it away.

And if you'd like to do me a favor in return, that's free too.

Pass it along. Text it to a friend. Send them the PDF. Post it on your story. If you do, tag me.

Who doesn't like a free book?

If another book ever comes out, it'll be free too.

And if your journey is just beginning, then mine probably isn't over yet either. I still have a lot of questions. We'll see where the road leads.

Thank you for taking this journey with me.

Until our paths cross again,

— Pierce O'Dell
Instagram: p_odell13
Facebook: Pierce O'Dell
Email: askpierceodell@gmail.com
P.S. If you've got a question that's been rattling around in your head for years, send it my way. Those are usually the interesting ones.
Please be respectful when reaching out. And if you're under the age of 18, I would prefer that any message comes from a parent, guardian, legal guardian, or whoever is steering your ship.

Although that does raise one final question:
Who's really steering the ship?

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Written with curiosity.