

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.

Thirty coffees for Lucija

Thirty stories, one with each coffee, six more for the shelf, and a film or a book for each week. Read one when you have a quiet moment. Nothing here is homework.

A MONTH OF SMALL MOVES

Thirty coffees

Thirty-six short stories, one for each coffee: six a week for five weeks, and six more for the shelf. They are dense on purpose. Each is one scene, one move, and the reason it holds; nothing in them is decoration, and who it is not for is said plainly underneath. So read slowly, and count on reading some of them two or three times before they open. The third reading is not a failure; it is part of the method. One story per coffee, then put the phone down, and do the thing or don't. Come back on the days that fit.

The stories happen in one city — a river, a streetcar called the Four, a subway line, a market on Saturdays. You will meet the same people more than once.

Each story is about someone else and written for you: the line above it says why it reached you, and the note below it says plainly how well its move has been studied and who it is not for.

The words are ours, written for this report. The moves come from the practice library, and each story says in its own voice how well its move has been studied. Where a study is named, it is listed at the back of this book.

 NOTES

SIX COFFEES

Week 1

This week: things that need nothing – a minute, no app, nobody watching.

WEEK 1 · 1

ENERGIZER

Environment · Energize › Empower

A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.

— HENRY ADAMS

The Second Sock

Lucija, this one reached you through comparing yourself to others. Here is a story about Ada, whose evenings run on past the point where anyone chose them.

The first sock has been finished since January. It sits on the arm of the chair, grey with a red toe, waiting for the other one the way one shoe waits by a door. The grandson it belongs to is nine and growing, and Ada knows exactly how many evenings a sock takes: four, if the evenings are hers. They have not been hers. The television ends an episode and starts the next by itself, with a small countdown in the corner. By the time she has looked up from the heel, the count is at three and the thing is decided.

It is February. The light comes back a minute a day, and she cannot feel it yet. The lamp is on by four.

Grace comes on Wednesday before bell practice at St. Anne's, for the half hour of knitting they have kept up for twenty years. She looks at the one sock, and at the television, and says, "You've been watching the whole of that."

"It watches itself. I'm only in the room."

Grace, who was a librarian and does not believe in things that happen by themselves, takes the remote and goes into it with her thumb, the way she goes into anything. She finds the switch under three menus and hands the remote back, her thumb marking the place. "There. Press that; it stops when it stops." Ada presses it, and Grace goes off to ring the bells.

That evening the episode ends. The credits roll, and the corner where the countdown lived is only black. Ada finds her hand has gone to the remote anyway, the thumb on the button, ready for a thing that no longer needs it. She holds it there. The credits finish, and the room goes quiet around the lamp.

She picks up the needles.

 NOTES

From the tower over the roofs the six bells start – the ringing going round and going wrong and going round again. She turns the heel with the bells carrying in over the windowsill. By the time they stop she has an inch of foot she did not have, and she has not started the next episode. An inch, and nobody to tell. She measures it against the first sock, and it matches, and the lamp is the only light in the room.

Ada held her thumb still through the credits and picked up the needles – and by the time the bells stopped she had an inch of foot she did not have.

A NOTE FROM US –

Switch autoplay off on every account, so each episode ends at its credits and the next takes a deliberate press. It needs two minutes.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING

Where this comes from: home streaming accounts. In an experiment with 76 American Netflix users where autoplay was switched off, daily watching and each session ran shorter, about eighteen minutes less a session, and the pauses between episodes grew. Schaffner et al., 2025.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Nothing here is hard to undo, and that is its weakness: it switches back on in five seconds, so lean it against something with more spine. Where there is no off switch, it has nothing to hold.

Inspired by: home streaming accounts, Schaffner et al., 2025 — Schaffner B., Ulloa R., et al., “An Experimental Study of Netflix Use and the Effects of Autoplay” (2025).

 NOTES

WEEK 1 · 2

ENERGIZER Environment · Energize › Empower

You give me fresh life and vigour. Adieu to disappointment and spleen. What are men to rocks and mountains?

— JANE AUSTEN

If It Buzzes

Lucija, this one reached you through stopping when you mean to. Here is a story about Mei, who has one spare hour a week, and whose phone takes it before anyone else can.

Mei rides the Four streetcar across the river once a week, with a hard hat still in her bag and one hour to give away. For most of a year the hour has gone to a boy of fourteen who does not want it. The scheme pairs an engineer with a kid from Northside and calls it mentoring. In September it is a bench outside the youth club: a boy at one end, Mei at the other, nothing in between.

The phone spends the hour too. It buzzes — work, the site, her sister. Mei's hand goes to it. Each time the hand comes back, the boy has closed like a shop.

On the bridge the streetcar rings twice, as it always does. Bernice drives the afternoon run this month. She says "mind the step, sweetheart" to a man getting off. This time Mei hears it as an engineer would: a rule that fires the same way every time, at the same point, with nobody deciding.

So she makes a rule of her own, in exactly these words: if it buzzes, it goes in the jacket, zipped, until the bench is over. A trigger, and the thing it sets off.

The bench again. Tyler sits at one end. The September air is clear. The gym door stands open, with the noise coming out of it. Nine minutes in, the phone buzzes in her hand — the site. She would say she has not been counting, but she has. Her thumb is already on the screen, and the boy has begun to close.

Jacket, zip. She does not look at it.

The zip is loud enough that Tyler looks over. He says nothing at first. After a while he says something about the gym teacher, without being asked. It is not much, but it is his. For the first time since spring, the hour has two people in it.

Leo comes across the yard for one of his runners. He has Tyler in class, and raises a hand. The phone buzzes twice more against her ribs, inside the jacket. Mei does not open it until the boy has gone in.

She does not know if it will hold next week. But she has the sentence, and it costs nothing to say it again on the bridge.

 NOTES

Mei made one rule – the phone goes in the jacket – and the boy began talking.

A NOTE FROM US –

Before the moment you know is coming, say the plan once, in exact words: if the hand goes to the phone, the phone goes into the jacket, zipped. That is a cue and a response, so less is left to decide in the moment. It needs nothing.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: goal-pursuit experiments. In a pooled review of studies with some eight thousand people, those who wrote an if-then plan naming the cue and the response reached their goals more often than people who only held the goal in mind. Gollwitzer and Sheeran, 2006.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for a perfectionist living on other people's standards: for them the line turns against itself, and a slip lands harder than it should. It is also not for a week when you are running on empty.

Inspired by: goal-pursuit experiments, Gollwitzer and Sheeran, 2006 — Gollwitzer, P. M., Sheeran, P., "Implementation intentions and goal achievement: A meta-analysis of effects and processes" (2006).

WEEK 1 · 3

ENERGIZER

Environment · Energize › Empower

Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.

— RACHEL CARSON

Grey Screen

Lucija, this one reached you through your pull toward social media. Here is a story about Nina, who must keep the phone within reach all night, so it ends up on the pillow itself.

The room above the dry cleaner's is Nina's for two weeks a year – the two weeks she is her father's daughter and nobody's nurse. In December it smells of the pressing machine downstairs, and of the cold that comes in after. Her father sleeps down the hall, and she can hear him not sleeping, which is a thing she has learned to hear.

She is on call. The hospital in the other city can ring at any hour, so the phone lies on the pillow beside her face, where the charger cable does not reach. It does what a phone on a pillow does: red, blue, a yellow badge, somebody's tree with lights on it. Her thumb goes down the glass before she has read any of it. The room is dark except for the phone.

NOTES

Her father coughs down the hall. Then his voice comes, aimed at the ceiling, the way he does it: "Go to sleep, Nina." He cannot know she is awake. He knows anyway.

She would put the phone on the table if she could. She cannot. So she lies with it, and its light is the one warm colour in the room. She can feel how the next hour would go: the tree, the badge, the tree again. If the call came, it would find her already tired.

She goes into the settings, four taps, and turns the colour off.

The screen goes grey. Somebody's tree becomes a grey tree, and the badge becomes a grey badge. It is remarkable how little there is on a grey screen to keep looking at. She lays the phone face up on the pillow, still on, still hers to answer. It lies there like a page of newsprint. The room comes back around it: the shirts below, the cold, her father's breathing growing even.

The hospital does not ring. In the morning she stands under the green awning while her father counts out change for the paper. The phone in her coat reports the night's screen minutes, as it does every morning. The number is smaller than most nights, and one night is one night. She hands him the grey screen.

"Looks like the paper," he says.

Nina turned the colour off, and the screen that had been keeping her awake became a page of grey newsprint with nothing left to look at.

A NOTE FROM US —

Switch the display to grayscale — it is under accessibility, four taps — and leave it there. Turn colour back on for a map, then off again. It needs nothing.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING

Where this comes from: a university campus. Undergraduates who set their phones to grayscale for eight to ten days spent less time on social media and browsing, about thirty-eight minutes a day less in all, video unchanged; mood improved in both groups alike, so grayscale claimed no mood effect. Holte and Ferraro, 2020.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for photographers, designers, or anyone who reads the screen by its colours. The reds and greens that carry meaning go grey with everything else, and that is a real loss.

Inspired by: a university campus, Holte and Ferraro, 2020 — Holte, A. J., Ferraro, F. R., "True colors: Grayscale setting reduces screen time in college students" (2020); Dekker, C. A., Baumgartner, S. E., "Is life brighter when your phone is not? The efficacy of a grayscale smartphone intervention addressing digital well-being" (2024).

 NOTES

WEEK 1 • 4

ENERGIZER Environment • Energize › Empower

The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander

— KATE CHOPIN

The Empties

Lucija, this one reached you through stopping when you mean to. Here is a story about Diego, who likes owning a plan he almost never needs.

Quiz night at Halloran's is a winter sport, and Diego trains for it by resting: the bike put away, the courier phone silenced in his coat, the corner table under the coat hooks held from the first pint. On the way down Ferry Street he had glanced up, out of habit, at the roof gutter opposite the tall windows. There the famous weed stands bare and unbeaten above the strings of lights, wearing December as if it had planned it.

Marcus is new to the quiz team this year – the barista, the bass player, recruited for the music round and worth it. Between rounds he is learning the team's customs. He learns the big one tonight.

There is always an argument. Quiz teams are machines for arguing; that is half of why anyone comes. But somewhere in an old winter Diego set himself one line for it, a private law, and it has held ever since. If the voices start climbing over each other, he stands up and carries the empties – the empty glasses – to the bar. That is the whole law. He does not announce it, he does not wait to win first, and he has never once minded the walk.

Tonight it happens once. The music round, naturally: a bassline Marcus knows professionally and the team captain knows wrongly. As the second lap of the argument begins, Diego is already up, glasses stacked, threading through the crowded room. From the bar, under the lights, he can see the table conducting itself with its hands. By the time he is back with the tray, the answer sheet says what Marcus said, and everyone believes they agreed on it warmly.

"You always fetch at the exact right moment," Marcus says, wiping the table with a beer mat, admiring.

"Lucky," Diego says.

It is not luck, and he enjoys that it looks like luck. The best rule he owns is the one nobody can see him keeping. Most weeks it sleeps the whole evening, and he wins the quiz anyway.

 NOTES

Diego was up with the glasses stacked as the second lap of the argument began, and by the time he was back with the tray the answer sheet said what Marcus said, and everyone believed they agreed on it warmly.

A NOTE FROM US —

Set one if-then line for the moment you know is coming, and keep it private — no announcing, no waiting to win first. It needs nothing.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: goal-pursuit experiments. In a pooled review of studies with some eight thousand people, those who wrote an if-then plan naming the cue and the response reached their goals more often than people who only held the goal in mind. Gollwitzer and Sheeran, 2006.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for the perfectionist living on other people's standards — the line turns on its keeper and the slip lands harder. Nor for a week running on empty.

Inspired by: goal-pursuit experiments, Gollwitzer and Sheeran, 2006 — Gollwitzer, P. M., Sheeran, P., "Implementation intentions and goal achievement: A meta-analysis of effects and processes" (2006).

WEEK 1 · 5

ENERGIZER

Environment · Energize › Empower

Musick has Charms to sooth a savage Breast, / To soften Rocks, or bend a knotted Oak.

— WILLIAM CONGREVE

The Last Four

Lucija, this one reached you through stopping when you mean to. Here is a story about Tomas, whose evenings have no last thing in them, only a next one.

In November the house on Northside is the stove and the lamp and not much else. It is dark at twenty to five. Tomas has the news at six with his supper, as he has since the post. After it, the pager sits on one arm of the chair and the phone on the other. The two of them make a kind of company that a man does not have to answer to and cannot leave.

Elena is at the table with the shop's phone, which is also the family's phone, doing the week's tickets. There is rain on the window. It has rained since All Saints' Day.

NOTES

"You've read that already," she says, not looking up. She is right. He reads the phone the way he used to check a bearing, by hand, over and over, for the comfort of it. The pager has not gone off since Tuesday's drill, and he watches it anyway. The stove ticks.

Around ten, Elena goes up to bed. The lamp is left for him, and the two things on the arms of the chair, and the drawer of the hall table open an inch, where the charger lives. He is not doing anything down here – that is the trouble he can name. There is nothing on the phone that is a reason to switch off the lamp, and the lamp is patient.

Then, far off, over the roofs, the last Four of the night rings twice on the bridge.

He has heard it for thirty years without hearing it. Twice, on the bridge, always. There is not another till five.

He gets up, and puts the phone and the pager on the hall table, and shuts the drawer on the charger, and turns off the lamp.

The pager can wake him from there. It has before. In the dark on the stairs the house is a small house with the stove going down in it and Elena breathing above. Nights since then are what nights are – some long, some not – and he keeps no tally on the drawer. But the Four goes over the bridge at ten past eleven and rings twice, and the lamp goes off, and that is the last thing.

Tomas heard the last Four of the night ring twice on the bridge, put the phone and the pager on the hall table, and the lamp going off was the last thing.

A NOTE FROM US –

Choose one evening cue from outside the room that comes at the same minute each night – the last streetcar, a bell. When it comes, the phone goes in the drawer and nothing comes after it. It needs nothing.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: medieval European towns. At a fixed hour each evening the curfew bell, the couvre-feu, rang to tell households to cover their fires for the night; the Angelus bells still mark hours the same way. (custom; no single record)

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for evening-shift workers, whose night starts when the cue comes. Not for parents of infants – no evening there is fixed enough.

Inspired by: medieval European towns, a custom with no single record.

NOTES

WEEK 1 · 6

COPER Focus · Filter › Flow

Forever is composed of Nows –

– EMILY DICKINSON

The Approach

Lucija, this one reached you through focus and attention. Here is a story about Marcus, whose nights end with the light still on, and who pays for them the next morning, right at the start.

Marcus has the key to the cafe on Ferry Street. He also has a bad night behind him: it ended with the phone, and the light stayed on long after. In October the corner is still dark at half past six, and the leaves are down in the doorway. The first thing the day asks of him is to begin, and beginning is the part he is worst at. He stands inside the door with the lights off. The bar is where he left it. The grinder is only a shape. Somewhere in him the night is still running, with a low sound like a fridge.

There is a small thing he does first. He did not invent it; it grew, the way a path grows across grass. He takes the cloth and wipes the bar once, left to right, from the corner to the cash register. He sets one cup upside down on the drip tray – the chipped one. He runs the grinder, pulls the first shot of espresso, tastes it from the shot glass, and throws it away. Then the lights go on. It takes under a minute, and it is the whole of his religion.

Today the phone is in his hand before the cloth is. It lit up in his pocket on the way in – nothing important, the band chat, a picture of a bass. His thumb is scrolling. The cloth is still on its hook. The night is winning again, in the dark, behind a locked door.

He looks at the thumb. He puts the phone in the drawer.

The cloth, left to right. The cup, upside down. The first pull, and the taste of it – too sour; the beans want a finer grind. His hand goes to the dial on the grinder before he has thought about it. That is the moment the day begins: the hand moving ahead of him. It happens every day at the same point, as if a starting line had been painted there.

Then the lights.

The back door bangs, and it is Jonah in the alley with the bins. The wind is off the river. St. Anne's is ringing something over the roofs – practice, or the hour; he never knows which. Jonah says, "You look like death."

"I'm open," Marcus says, and turns the sign on the door.

 NOTES

Marcus shut the phone in a drawer and did his small ritual, and the day began.

A NOTE FROM US —

Keep three small actions in a fixed order right before starting — a wipe, a cup, a taste, then go. Never add a step, never vary the order. It needs nothing.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: sport. Across 112 pooled measurements of athletes who ran a fixed routine before the serve, the kick or the putt, performance improved for beginners and elites alike, under low and high pressure, whatever the routine's shape. Rupperecht, Tran and Gröpel, 2021.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for anyone with compulsive rituals — a fixed sequence before acting is exactly their shape. If the routine starts to harden into superstition, or it upsets you when it cannot be done, that is the sign to stop.

Inspired by: sport, Rupperecht, Tran and Gröpel, 2021 — Rupperecht A. G. O., Tran U. S., Gröpel P., “The effectiveness of pre-performance routines in sports: a meta-analysis” (2021).

NOTES

SIX COFFEES

Week 2

This week: things that need nothing – a minute, no app, nobody watching. Quiet you choose and quiet that is imposed on you are different things; the stories about stillness here are about the first.

WEEK 2 · 1

COPER

Focus · Filter › Flow

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.

– ECCLESIASTES 9:10 (KJV)

Three Deliveries

Lucija, this one reached you through the weight of always being on. Here is a story about Priya, whose mornings arrive in small pieces, one ping at a time.

Priya draws buildings for a living, at the kitchen table. In January the table gets the only good light in the house – one low hour of it, clean across the wood. The phone spends that hour talking. Nothing large: a parcel rescheduled, the message thread from the studio building, the news deciding twice in ten minutes that she should know something. Each ping costs a glance. Each glance costs the sentence she was carrying. And again, the first real sentence of the day goes untyped.

At noon she meets Maya under the Union clock, which is two minutes fast and always has been, so that the whole city arrives early and pretends it meant to. They carry soup up to the sixth floor of 600 Ferry. Maya, dry as ever, nods at a desk two rows over. The man there switched everything off in the new year, all of it. Now he surfaces every few minutes to make sure nothing has happened, and flinches when anyone else's phone sounds. "He's quieter," Maya says. "He isn't calmer."

Walking to the streetcar, Priya thinks about the mail. The mail comes once. Nobody stands at the door all day in case of the mail.

That evening her thumb is on the settings before she has finished deciding, which is how she knows the deciding is real. She sets it up: everything held back, and delivered three times a day – mid-morning, after lunch, at the end of work. A delivery arrives, she clears it, and it is done: a small bounded thing with an end on it, like a mail call.

NOTES

The first mornings her hand still drifts to the dark screen and finds nothing there to collect. Then the hand stops going. The hour of good light goes whole to the north elevation, the drawing of the building's north side. Her attention stays where she sets it down, and the day feels more like hers to steer — a thing she mentions to nobody. The phone speaks at eleven, at two, at five. In between, the house is quiet, the light crosses the table, and the sentences arrive one behind the other, in order, taking as long as they take.

Priya set everything to arrive three times a day like a mail call, and the first mornings her hand still drifted to the dark screen and found nothing to collect, and then the hand stopped going, and the hour of good light went whole to the north elevation.

A NOTE FROM US —

Set the phone to hold everything and deliver it at three fixed times a day; clear each batch and it is done. It needs nothing.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: a field experiment at Duke. Among 237 people whose phone notifications were held and delivered three times a day, attention, mood and felt control improved; hourly batching did little, and switching alerts off entirely left people more anxious. Fitz et al., 2019.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for genuine on-call duty, or for anyone waiting on urgent word about someone.

Inspired by: a field experiment at Duke, Fitz et al., 2019 — Fitz N., Kushlev K., Jagannathan R., Lewis T., Paliwal D., Ariely D., “Batching smartphone notifications can improve well-being” (2019).

 NOTES

WEEK 2 · 2

COPER Alertness · Awe · Achievement, Nourishment · Nurture · Natural

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower*

— WILLIAM BLAKE

The First Mouthful

Lucija, this one reached you through life beyond the screen. Here is a story about Amir, who likes giving the first taste of a thing its whole half minute.

The family sleeps in the car on the way north. Amir drives the hour to the state forest with the heater low and the wipers on their slowest setting. He left Northside so early that the streets still belonged to the night shift. The first Four streetcar had not yet rung its bell on the bridge. The app in his pocket had not yet thought of anything to want from him. The app is off. On forest days it is off, and that is an old, settled agreement, not this morning's news.

The rain stops as the oak trees begin. He parks at the start of the forest road. While the car ticks as it cools and the family sleeps on, he steps out with the thermos into the first grey light. The mist stands over the ditch water like breath over tea.

Then comes the small ceremony that nobody has ever been told about. He pours the first cup, and gives the first mouthful its whole half minute.

Not the cup – the mouthful. Eyes open, coffee held in the mouth, the drinking slowed down until it has parts. The heat arrives, the bitterness turns over, and the sugar he stirred in at home comes up late, like a shy guest. Around the mouthful, at no charge, the rest arrives too. There is wet oak leaf, and cold air with the forest on it. A crow away north says whatever crows say at that hour. Half a minute is a long time. It is remarkable what fits in it.

His daughter is awake after all. From the fogged back window she watches her father stand in a wet lane doing, by the look of it, nothing. She files it away with the other strange things fathers do.

He puts the cap back on the thermos. The day can begin now. It has been paid for. There will be the picnic under the bare oaks, the children hunting late mushrooms they will be forbidden to touch. Then the drive back into the lit city. The rest of the coffee will be drunk the ordinary way, at the ordinary speed, by a man who had his half minute and is not owed a thing.

 NOTES

Amir poured the first cup in the wet lane and gave the first mouthful its whole half minute, and around it, at no charge, arrived the wet oak leaf, the cold air with the forest on it, and a crow away north.

A NOTE FROM US —

Give one ordinary thing — the first sip, the first bite — its whole half minute, eyes open, slowed until it has parts. It needs nothing.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: positive psychology. Bryant and Veroff set out savouring, attending to and drawing out a good experience as it happens, as a model and a frame for savouring exercises; the book defines the practice and measures nothing itself. Bryant and Veroff, 2007.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for a flat stretch — dwelling on purpose can push the mood lower in someone already feeling little. Then just drink it.

Inspired by: positive psychology, Bryant and Veroff, 2007.

WEEK 2 · 3

COPER

Focus · Filter › Flow

Concentration is the secret of strength in politics, in war, in trade, in short, in all management of human affairs.

— RALPH WALDO EMERSON

The Door Not Yet Pushed

Lucija, this one reached you through the weight of always being on. Here is a story about Kasia, who starts the afternoon on whichever thing shouts first.

The bench outside the lab door at Riverside is called the smokers' bench, and nobody has smoked on it in years. People sit on it with a sandwich and a phone and look at the river without seeing it. Kasia is one of them, in May, with her badge in her hand and the door not yet pushed. Behind the door are the afternoon's runs, four racks of samples, in an order she knows. In her hand is the chat.

The chat is the mushroom people, her group of mushroom hunters. In May there is nothing to find, and they are finding it anyway: morels somebody's cousin swears by, a slope in the state forest with nothing on it, an argument about a book. It is the warmest room she knows.

NOTES

Jade comes round the corner after a night shift, grey in the face, and sits on the other end of the bench. After a while she says, "You've been looking at that door for five minutes."

"I've been looking at the phone."

"Same thing, from here."

Kasia knows how the afternoon goes when the door gets pushed with the chat still open inside her. The racks get done, yes, but the chat runs on inside the racks. The argument about the book gets carried down the corridor like a coat she forgot to take off. The second rack gets started before the first is logged, because a message comes, and the hand goes to it, and the eyes go with the hand. That is how the morning went.

She stands. She says it out loud, once, to the door, not loud: "First rack, logged. Then the second. The chat at four."

Jade, behind her, says nothing, which is the kindest thing Jade knows how to do.

Then she pushes the door and does the sentence. The sentence, having been said into the air, is easier to find again than the same words only thought – she makes nothing more of that. At four the chat is still there, forty-one messages and none of them urgent. She reads them on the bench with the shift done, while the far bank takes the light and her own bank is already in shadow. That is how it goes at that hour, and it has nothing to do with her.

Kasia said the next thing out loud to the door before she pushed it – and the afternoon went in the order she had said.

A NOTE FROM US –

Before you push the door, say the next thing in one short sentence, out loud, and then do exactly that. In earshot of others, mouth it instead. It needs nothing.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: Japanese railways. Drivers and platform staff point at the signal, the gauge or the door and call out what they see before acting on it, on every run; the production-effect memory experiments are related reading. (custom; no single record)

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for a shared office where speaking to nobody feels exposing. For some autistic and socially anxious adults it costs more than it gives; mouth it instead, or skip it.

Inspired by: Japanese railways, a custom with no single record.

NOTES

WEEK 2 · 4

COPER Focus · Filter › Flow

My experience is what I agree to attend to.

— WILLIAM JAMES

The Mail Keeps

Lucija, this one reached you through the weight of always being on. Here is a story about Ethan, who likes knowing exactly when his email will find him.

September mornings out past the railway line are as clear as rinsed glass. Ethan bikes to the warehouse site the long way, by the water. He likes passing the pier at dawn, where the same pair of gulls stands every morning, looking, as always, like the management.

He is the apprentice electrician on the new part of the warehouse: pipes and channels for cable, the endless grey spaghetti of a big shed. Since the start of the month he is also the one who carries the site phone. The foreman watched him for a year and then handed it over with the words "Don't marry it."

He has not married it. He has given it office hours. He opens the mail at the three pauses the day already owns. The first is after the first big pull of cable is in place, when everyone stands around flexing their hands anyway. The second is after lunch, on the drum stack, the pile of big cable reels, with his boots in the sun. The third is at the gates, before the padlock, when whatever is in there is tomorrow's business by definition. Between those, the phone rides in his tool vest with the volume off, and the wiring gets a whole electrician instead of most of one.

Mid-morning brings a test of it: a supplier mixup, the wrong reels delivered with the right paperwork. The message sits in the dark phone until the lunch pause. It gets read on the drum stack, answered in a line or so, and is sorted by the afternoon truck. Nothing burned down. Nothing ever has.

"You never answer straight off," says the truck driver, who answers everything at once, from a cab covered with his own notifications.

"The mail keeps," Ethan says, signing the delivery note. "Copper doesn't." He means the mail stays fresh while it waits, but the copper wire in his hands needs him now.

At the gates he opens the mail for the last time, standing in the long gold light. He sends in the day's tally and puts the phone away, switched off. The ride home goes past the pier again. The gulls, he notes with approval, have finished work too.

 NOTES

Ethan let the supplier mixup sit in the dark phone until the lunch pause, answered it in a line from the drum stack, and it was sorted by the afternoon truck, and nothing burned down, and nothing ever has.

A NOTE FROM US —

Open the mail at three fixed pauses the day already owns, and let it be shut between them. It needs nothing.

NOTHING TO BUY · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: office email. In a study where people opened their mail only three times a day for a week, they reported less stress than in a week of unlimited checking. Kushlev and Dunn, 2015.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for a role with real response-time duties — set the exception first. And an anxious checker can end up worse, the pile growing in the head instead.

Inspired by: office email, Kushlev and Dunn, 2015 — Kushlev, K., Dunn, E. W., “Checking email less frequently reduces stress” (2015).

WEEK 2 · 5

COPER

Alertness · Awe › Achievement

*O, wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as others see us!*

— ROBERT BURNS

The Seed Tin

Lucija, this one reached you through life beyond the screen. Here is a story about Ivy, who likes to keep a little of each day where she can find it again.

On the shelf over Ivy's desk, between the dictionary and the mug from home, sits an old seed tin. It has big squash painted on the lid. By the end of April it will be so full that the lid does not quite close. Every night before the light goes out, she writes on a slip of paper three things she noticed that day. She folds the slip into the tin. They are small things, mostly. The exact green of the roof gutters after rain. The man on the stairs who whistles only going down. The word her lecturer says when he has lost his place.

She started in the autumn, for no better reason than that the tin was empty and the city was new. It lasted the way only pointless things last.

NOTES

Today the special event is the garden. A boy from her building has talked her into helping at the community garden plots by the railway cut. They are a whole village of little kingdoms, with a queue at the shared water tap and somebody's beans already tied up on strings. It is the best crowd she has stood in since she left home. Nothing there wants her phone. Everything wants a bucket.

That night's slips nearly write themselves. Turned earth on her own hands. An old man blessing a wheelbarrow under his breath. The blossom on the river path, which the whole tap queue agreed would not last the week.

On the slow Sunday she does what she does some Sundays. She tips a handful of old slips onto the blanket and reads the winter back. First frost, first friend, the bells of St. Anne's arriving over the rooftops on a wind off the river. It is like finding money in a coat, except that it was never money, and she put it there herself.

A few slips stay out on the desk like receipts. The rest go back in the tin.

Through the open balcony door, the bells of St. Anne's are ringing again, far off, carried over the railway cut. She pulls a fresh slip toward her and writes them down for tonight, before they have finished.

Ivy writes the day's three small things into the seed tin – and reading them back in winter is like finding money she hid in her own coat.

A NOTE FROM US –

If you feel like trying it: before bed, write three things you noticed today on a slip of paper. It needs a pencil and a tin.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: an internet study in positive psychology. Among 577 people assigned exercises, those who wrote three good things each night reported more happiness and fewer depressive symptoms than a placebo group, for up to six months. Seligman et al., 2005.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for the low weeks. There, three things can turn into forced cheer, or into a fourth line about all that went unnoticed.

Inspired by: an internet study in positive psychology, Seligman et al., 2005 — Seligman M.E.P., Steen T.A., Park N., Peterson C., “Positive Psychology Progress: Empirical Validation of Interventions” (2005).

NOTES

WEEK 2 · 6

COPER

Focus · Filter › Flow, Separation · Solitude › Success

A man may write at any time, if he will set himself doggedly to it.

— SAMUEL JOHNSON

The Fifteenth

Lucija, this one reached you through the weight of always being on. Here is a story about Elena, whose head keeps carrying what her hands have already handed over.

The pressing machine at Elena's Cleaners is dying the way a big animal dies, slowly and with dignity. Everyone on Northside brings an opinion in with their shirts. Elena has done her part: she chose the model, signed the quote, and sent the papers to the supplier. Now the answer will come when the supplier's own suppliers answer him — two weeks, he said, maybe three.

Her part is over. Nobody has told her head.

The shop phone and the family phone are the same phone. That means the supplier lives in her apron pocket — at the stove, at the Sunday table with the door off the latch. Every night her thumb visits him, refreshing a mailbox that owes her nothing, while the potatoes boil over behind her.

Beatriz is the one who says the thing, one wet morning under the green awning, while the two of them wait for a shower to pass. Beatriz hands in her building keys at the end of every early shift. "When the keys go up, they're up," she says. "I look on Friday. Not before. My side is done, and done things don't get carried."

That evening, in the shop's back room, Elena opens the order book to a clean page and writes one line in pencil: press — with the supplier — the fifteenth.

That is the entire system. She draws no columns.

Until the fifteenth, the press is not hers. It is a line in a book, parked. A line in a book does not climb the stairs to dinner. For the first two evenings her thumb forgets and finds the mailbox anyway. Both times she puts the phone in the drawer with the paper rolls for the till. By the weekend the stove has her whole attention, which the potatoes notice first.

On the fourteenth the supplier calls her himself, a day ahead of the pencil. Delivery next month. After the call she opens the book and crosses out the line. Then she looks for a long moment at the clean page underneath: next year's problems, none of them written yet, none of them hers tonight.

NOTES

Elena parked the waiting as one pencil line in the order book – and the press stopped climbing the stairs to dinner.

A NOTE FROM US –

The moment work leaves your hands for someone else's decision, write one line: the item, who has it, and the date you touch it next. Until that date it is theirs, not yours. It needs a pencil.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: David Allen's Getting Things Done. The moment work leaves your hands it goes on a waiting-for list, item and who has it, reviewed on a fixed day; the named return date on the line is the tactic's own addition. Allen, 2001.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for anyone who turns systems into the project itself. If the list starts growing columns, that is the sign: one line per item, nothing more.

Inspired by: David Allen's Getting Things Done, Allen, 2001.

 NOTES

SIX COFFEES

Week 3

This week: six small moves – nothing to buy first.

WEEK 3 · 1

COPER

Alertness · Awe · Achievement, Separation · Solitude · Success

The world will never starve for want of wonders; but only for want of wonder.

– G. K. CHESTERTON

One Side

Lucija, this one reached you through life beyond the screen. Here is a story about Frank, whose hands go looking for a job the moment he sits down to rest.

There is a crate of records at the shady end of the market, between the honey stall and a box of loose doorknobs. Frank goes through it the slow way, with two fingers, reading the spines. He is not looking for anything. That is what he tells Ray, who has wandered over from the flower woman's stall: "Not looking for anything."

"Found it yet," Ray says.

He carries it home flat under his arm, like something official. It is a string quartet, the sleeve soft at the corners, with somebody else's name in pencil on the back. His father's record player has been under the window shelf since the flat held two people, and it still works. Things that old were built expecting to be kept.

The afternoon does its August work. The heat climbs, the light goes brassy, and at four the thunderstorm arrives like a scheduled train. Frank puts the record on and sits down in the good chair to do nothing else, which turns out to be the whole difficulty. His hands ask for the paper. The clock on the shelf offers itself for winding, though it does not need any. Twice in the first movement he is half out of the chair, on an errand that neither he nor the errand has invented yet. Twice he sits back down and leaves the paper folded.

Then he finds the cello and holds on.

It goes down under the tune and along, like the heavy weight low in a ship, one line under all the others, going where it is needed and never hurrying. He follows it through the slow movement while the rain drums on the roof. Somewhere in there, the chair stops being a thing he is about to get up from.

NOTES

The side ends by itself. The arm of the player lifts, clicks over, settles. The rain has finished. The window is open, and the smell of the river comes up the street, as it does after rain.

He slides the record back into its sleeve with the other side unplayed – kept, like a return ticket.

Frank put the record on, sat down in the good chair, and found the cello and held on, and somewhere in the slow movement the chair stopped being a thing he was about to get up from.

A NOTE FROM US –

Put on one whole piece of music and do nothing else — sit, follow one instrument all the way through, and let the piece end itself. It needs a player and a free half hour.

ONE SITTING · NEEDS A THING OR TWO · NEEDS A BLOCK OF TIME

Where this comes from: Japan. In the jazz kissa, the listening coffeehouse, people sit with a coffee while a whole record is played through on a good system, and talk is kept low or not allowed; nothing there is measured. (custom; no single record)

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not with music that carries a loss — choose the piece with care. For a head that loops in quiet, a short piece first.

Inspired by: Japan, a custom with no single record.

WEEK 3 · 2

COPER

Separation · Solitude › Success

*The soul selects her own society,
Then shuts the door*

— EMILY DICKINSON

The Third Person

Lucija, this one reached you through fear of missing out. Here is a story about Grace, who likes to iron a decision flat before it is worn.

After the boys have been through it, the youth club kitchen is mostly spilled fruit squash and crumbs. Grace cleans it up alone, by choice, with her coat still on. She likes this half hour. The gym has gone quiet. The noticeboard rustles when the door swings. And the work is the kind that ends: counters, cups, done.

NOTES

Tomorrow she has a telephone call she would rather not make. The diocese has asked her to take on a second bell tower, with its own team of ringers. It is a compliment dressed up as a request. Grace plans to say no to a man she has known for forty years and has never once said no to.

So she wipes the long counter and interviews herself about it, out loud, in the third person, using her own name instead of I. It is a thing she does, and she has long since stopped apologising to the cutlery for it. "Grace will thank him," she says. "Grace will say it plainly. One tower is a life; two is a diary." From one step outside herself, the whole matter turns out to be short, reasonable, and unkind to nobody.

She has noticed that the trick only works with the name. Said with I, the sentences wobble and start explaining themselves. Said with Grace, they stand up straight, like bell ringers called by their full names.

The counter comes up clean. The cups go on their hooks, handles pointing east. Every week the club ignores that arrangement, and every week she puts it back, like a tide with a tea towel. Tomorrow evening is bell-ringing practice at St. Anne's. She will climb the tower stairs with the no already said, and with nothing on her mind but her six bells and who is slow into the changes, the patterns the bells ring in.

"Grace will also want tea first," she says, and smiles. She has caught herself out from the outside, where, it seems, all of her is visible.

She hangs the towel exactly in the middle of its rail and turns off the lights. She leaves the kitchen the way she plans to leave the telephone call: finished, and on her own terms.

 NOTES

Grace rehearsed the refusal out loud in the third person – and said with her own name, the sentences stood up straight.

A NOTE FROM US –

Before an awkward call, talk yourself through it once using your own name instead of I – silently and briefly, as it was studied; out loud, as Grace does, is our own variant. It needs nothing.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING

Where this comes from: the psychology lab. In seven experiments, people who talked themselves through a first impression or a speech using their own name rather than 'I' saw it as a challenge, were rated as doing better, and brooded less. Kross et al., 2014.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for anyone to whom it feels like one step out too many. Some people find their own name from the outside plainly unsettling, and for them it stops there.

Inspired by: the psychology lab, Kross et al., 2014 — Kross, E., Bruehlman-Senecal, E., Park, J., Burson, A., Dougherty, A., Shablack, H., Bremner, R., Moser, J., Ayduk, O., "Self-talk as a regulatory mechanism: How you do it matters" (2014); Moser, J. S., Dougherty, A., Mattson, W. I., Katz, B., Moran, T. P., Guevarra, D., Shablack, H., Ayduk, O., Jonides, J., Berman, M. G., Kross, E., "Third-person self-talk facilitates emotion regulation without engaging cognitive control" (2017); Wisco B. E., Nolen-Hoeksema S., "Effect of visual perspective on memory and interpretation in dysphoria" (2011); Ayduk, O., Kross, E., "Analyzing negative experiences without ruminating: The role of self-distancing in enabling adaptive self-reflection" (2010).

WEEK 3 · 3

COPER

Alertness · Awe › Achievement

I find ecstasy in living – the mere sense of living is joy enough.

– EMILY DICKINSON, AS RECORDED BY T. W. HIGGINSON

Eleven Trees

Lucija, this one reached you through life beyond the screen. Here is a story about Denise, whose lunch gets eaten standing up with the phone in the other hand.

Denise eats lunch standing at her desk on the sixth floor, out of the paper bag. This has gone on so long that the bag has its own place, by the mug of the week. Behind 600 Ferry, her building, there is a strip of grass and eleven trees along the river path. The building calls it the park, and nobody from her floor has ever been to it. In June the windows do not open. The light comes in flat off the identical building opposite and lies on the desks like something spilt.

NOTES

The sandwich is gone. Her hand goes to the phone. The family chat is there, with the girl's question about Saturday, and the twenty minutes left of lunch begin to go where they always go.

Lena is at the door with the recycling box. Lena's own lunch is a yoghurt in the car. "You've got grass on your shoes."

"I've got a floor on my shoes."

"There's grass out the back. Eleven trees. I counted them from the ladies!" And then she goes.

Maya, at the desk opposite, does not look up, but her eyebrows do.

Denise folds the empty bag into her pocket and takes the stairs down.

Walking at half pace is the whole method, and she is bad at it, being a woman who walks the way she talks. She counts five things seen: the eleven trees, which really are eleven; the river; a runner; the identical building, which from the back is not identical; and – she has to look for the fifth – the weed in the roof gutter everybody talks about, small from here and holding on. Then four things heard, counting on her fingers: the streetcar on the bridge, a gull, her shoes on the gravel, the wind in eleven trees. Then three things smelt or felt: the cut grass, the river, the sun on her neck. She had forgotten the sun did that.

She turns back at the tenth tree, fingers still up. Her body is quieter on the stairs going up than it was going down. She would not put it any higher than that.

At the desk the phone still has Saturday on it. She tells Maya there are eleven trees. Maya says she knows. Denise says nobody on this floor knows anything.

Denise took her twenty minutes out among the trees, counting what she could see and hear and feel – and came back up the stairs quieter than she went down.

A NOTE FROM US –

Take the twenty minutes outside, at half your usual pace. Go through the senses on your fingers: five things seen, four heard, three smelt or felt. It needs the lunch break, nothing else.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK · OUTDOORS · NEEDS A BLOCK OF TIME

Where this comes from: Japan. Shinrin-yoku, forest bathing, is a slow walk under trees with the senses open, set up as a programme by the Forestry Agency in 1982; the count on the fingers is not part of the original form. (custom; no single record)

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for a lunch break already eaten by a meeting, and not for a day when the body needs to sit instead.

Inspired by: Japan, a custom with no single record.

NOTES

WEEK 3 · 4

COPER Separation · Solitude › Success, Nourishment · Nurture › Natural*I was never less alone than when by myself.*

— EDWARD GIBBON

The Bench Behind St. Anne's

Lucija, this one reached you through fear of missing out. Here is a story about Mikolos, who likes a lunch that belongs to nothing but itself.

His market stall comes down the way it always does: fast, loud, and exactly on time. The sandwich made at the farm that morning rides on the passenger seat like a small passenger of its own. Mikolos does not eat it in the van. He has a bench for it.

The bench is behind St. Anne's church, in the yard where the bell tower's long shadow lies down in the afternoon. It is his by the unwritten law of Saturdays. On the way from the market square he stops for a newspaper at the newsstand. The regulars there are arguing about the weed in the roof gutter across the street: whether it is taller than last June, and whether the man whose window faces it waters it in secret. He leaves them to it, richer by a paper he may not open.

At the bench he takes the phone from his apron. It is the stall's payment phone, which lives there all week like a pebble in a shoe. He puts the phone in his coat and lays the coat over the far arm of the bench. An arm's length is, in his experience, exactly far enough. Then he unwraps the sandwich, and the small closed hour begins.

There is bread, and his own cheese from the cellar, the sharp one. There is June warmth on the stones. The bells above him are silent but present, the way a big dog is present. He eats slowly, because nothing else is being done. The sandwich, having his whole attention, behaves like a better sandwich than it is.

A pigeon inspects the ground by his boots and is disappointed.

When the wrapper is folded, he sits a little longer with his face to the sun. Then he collects the coat and the phone, in that order, and walks back to the van. The phone has saved up its small noises for him. They wait, he has found. Everything on that phone waits for the length of a sandwich, and nobody has ever starved waiting for an answer.

 NOTES

Mikolos laid the phone an arm's length away for the length of a sandwich – and the sandwich, having his whole attention, behaved like a better sandwich than it was.

A NOTE FROM US –

If you feel like trying it: eat the solo meal as its own event, with the phone out of reach until the meal ends. It needs nothing.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: the eating laboratory. Pooled across 24 experiments where people ate while distracted, most often by a screen, they ate somewhat more at that meal and markedly more later; what was eaten was the only thing measured, and the solo table rule itself was not tested. Robinson et al., 2013.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for anyone whose past with food has been hard — take a transit or waiting version of the closed hour instead. This promises nothing about weight.

Inspired by: the eating laboratory, Robinson et al., 2013 — Robinson, E., Aveyard, P., Daley, A., Jolly, K., Lewis, A., Lycett, D., Higgs, S., "Eating attentively: a systematic review and meta-analysis of the effect of food intake memory and awareness on eating" (2013).

WEEK 3 · 5

COPER

Alertness · Awe › Achievement, Separation · Solitude › Success

The important thing is not to stop questioning.

— ALBERT EINSTEIN

The Lamp on the Sill

Lucija, this one reached you through life beyond the screen. Here is a story about Ruth, whose first light in the house at dusk is the phone.

In November the dark comes for the afternoon while the afternoon is still using it. Ruth and Grace walk the river path in the hour that is left, on gravel and wet leaves. The far bank has the last of the light. It always gets the last of it: the whole opposite shore holds a brightness their own side has already given away. On the bridge above them the Four streetcar crosses and rings twice, because it always rings twice there. The sound comes down flat through the damp air.

"My grandmother lit the lamp when the light went," Grace says, looking at the far bank. "Puja. The conch, the incense, the half hour of it. Hers to do, because she was the oldest woman in that house — and there were days of the month she was not let in the room."

NOTES

Ruth walks home with that picture – an old woman lighting a lamp for prayer at dusk – and with the part she has no claim on.

Her own dusks have a shape she is not proud of. The rooms go grey around her, and the first lit thing in the house is the phone. On it are the little hearts she sends out for every kindness – thanks with no body to them, gone by morning. The screen makes its own cold weather in her front room. Some evenings she sits in it until the streetlights come on and shame her into putting the kettle on.

There is a brass lamp of her mother's at the back of the hall cupboard. It takes her ten minutes to find it, and longer to find a wick.

The next afternoon, when the grey starts, she does not sit down. She sets the lamp on the front sill, lights it, and stands for the minute the flame takes to steady. It is one small warm thing between her and the whole blue evening. The day is over. The evening is a different country, and it is lit.

Then she gets out the postcards and writes one, in ink, to an address and not a phone number. The lamp burns down its inch while she does.

From the river path, if anyone is on it at that hour, hers is the one window with a flame in it. The flame is the size of a thumbnail, the size of the far bank.

Ruth set her mother's brass lamp on the front sill when the grey started and stood the minute the flame took to steady, and then wrote a postcard in ink, to an address and not a number.

A NOTE FROM US –

When the daylight fails, stop, light one small lamp in the same spot, and stand for the minute it takes to catch. It needs a lamp and a sill.

ONE SITTING · NEEDS A THING OR TWO

Where this comes from: South Asian households. At dusk, as daylight goes, a small oil lamp, the diya, is lit in a fixed place in the home and the evening counts as begun; only the lamp is borrowed, not the rite. (custom; no single record)

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not an open flame with children or cats in the room – a shut lantern or an electric lamp then.

Inspired by: South Asian households, a custom with no single record.

NOTES

WEEK 3 · 6

COPER

Alertness · Awe › Achievement

The invariable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common.

— RALPH WALDO EMERSON

The Coin Tray

Lucija, this one reached you through life beyond the screen. Here is a story about Ray, whose mornings start at a stand he knows down to the last coin but has never once properly looked at.

Ray has run the newspaper stand under the green awning for nineteen years, and he counts things: papers out, pens gone, the day's money against the weather. He is a counting man in a green-lit box. The counting means he knows the stand down to the last coin. It does not mean he has ever looked at it.

Frank arrives at 6:05, as he always arrives at 6:05. He takes his paper and pauses with his change over the coin tray. "That corner's worn through to the brass," he says, and that is the whole conversation. Then he goes for his train.

Ray looks. The corner is worn through to the brass.

He stands there while the Four streetcar crosses the bridge and rings its two rings. He looks at the coin tray properly for the first time in nineteen years, and before the next customer comes he has found three things. The wear is not in the middle, where he would have sworn it was, but at the near right corner, where his own thumb pushes the change across. Under the felt edge there is a scratch, old, half a name long, that he cannot explain at all. And the dip of the worn part holds the early light for a minute, a little brass pond. Then the light is gone, when the sun rises above the building opposite.

Nineteen years. It was his wife who bought the tray, in the first spring of the stand, and it might be her ring that made the scratch. That is a large thing to find inside six square inches before the town is properly awake. He stands with it a while, and sells a lottery ticket in the middle of standing with it.

After that it becomes the way he opens every morning. Shutter up, and then one thing — the hinge, the price rail, the knot in the plywood shelf — looked at until it gives up three details. Some mornings the details are dull, and the looking is quick, and nobody minds.

"Scratch under the felt," he tells the ceiling of the stand on the third morning, in case his wife is listening. "Your ring, I think."

NOTES

Ray looked at the coin tray properly for the first time in nineteen years and found the wear at the near right corner, the old scratch half a name long, and the little brass pond of early light.

A NOTE FROM US —

Before the day opens, pick one thing you have never properly looked at — a hinge, a worn corner — and look until you can name three details. It needs nothing.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: a book of attention exercises. Walker collects the practice of picking one overlooked object and looking at it until it gives up its details; the book documents the exercise form and measures nothing. Walker, 2019.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not one to force — if naming details feels silly, look longer and name fewer. Nothing else is needed.

Inspired by: a book of attention exercises, Walker, 2019.

 NOTES

SIX COFFEES

Week 4

This week: six small moves – nothing to buy first.

WEEK 4 · 1

ENERGIZER

Environment · Energize › Empower

there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good-humour

– CHARLES DICKENS

Ten Seconds

Lucija, this one reached you through the pull of your phone. Here is a story about Maya, whose thumb finds the same small square again and again and finds nothing in it.

The meeting ends early, and Maya is back at her desk on the sixth floor of 600 Ferry with forty minutes she did not expect. It is February, and the light is coming back a minute a day. Ray said so this morning under the awning, handing over the gum, as if the light were a customer he had been expecting. Across the street the identical building wears the identical grey. The printed agenda is on the desk, two items ticked, the phone on top of it, face up.

Her thumb finds the small square of the app. It found it twice since lunch, with nothing in it either time, and there is nothing in it now. She knows that in the part of herself that does the knowing, but the thumb does not ask that part.

Nobody is looking. That is not the point. The point is that the afternoon has forty minutes, and the square will take fifteen and give back a greyer version of the same forty.

She had set the thing up on Sunday, with the cat on the chair beside her: a free app that stands in front of two other apps and holds the door shut for ten seconds, then asks whether she still wants in. She had thought it was for the evenings.

The thumb goes down. The door does not open. There is a grey screen and a count: ten, nine. And something in the hand – the small pull that had it there before she did – has nowhere to go. It sits there, in the count, being looked at.

She does not wait for the question. She turns the phone face down on the agenda and slides the agenda out from under it.

NOTES

Item three is a reconciliation, a matching of figures, that she has been not doing since Monday. She does it. It is dull and it gets done. Later the thumb goes to the phone out of habit, meets the count, and comes back at four, unopened. That is the second time today an opening has ended at the door, and she leaves it at four. Downstairs Ray will be counting the minutes of light. Up here it is a minute longer than yesterday, and she can nearly see it on the far building.

Maya met the grey count at the door of the small square, turned the phone face down on the agenda, and the reconciliation that had waited since Monday got done.

A NOTE FROM US —

Install a free pause app that stands in front of one chosen app and holds the door for ten seconds, then asks whether you still want in. Let it run every time. It needs one install.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING

Where this comes from: the one sec app. In a study where a breathing pause stood before a chosen app, users closed it at the pause in about a third of attempts and openings fell by more than half. Grüning, Riedel and Lorenz-Spreen, 2023.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for anyone without a smartphone, or unwilling to install one more app. The laptop door has no pause.

Inspired by: the one sec app, Grüning, Riedel and Lorenz-Spreen, 2023 — Grüning D.J., Riedel F., Lorenz-Spreen P., “Directing smartphone use through the self-nudge app one sec” (2023).

 NOTES

WEEK 4 · 2

COPER Alertness · Awe › Achievement, Nourishment · Nurture › Natural

Men are disturbed, not by things, but by the principles and notions which they form concerning things.

— EPICTETUS

Twenty Minutes of Rain

Lucija, this one reached you through life beyond the screen. Here is a story about Beatriz, whose evening gets decided by the rain before she has decided anything.

Beatriz is home from the early shift while there is still some day left, and in November that is not much. The rain has been on the window since lunch. The coat is on the hook by the door, with the boots under it. There was a plan for the evening – something outdoors, by the river. The plan is being quietly replaced by the sofa, the small screen and the lamp.

She sits down with the phone to check one thing. The one thing is the message from her cousin's daughter – let's catch up soon – which she has read four times and never answered. Under it is the feed, and under the feed, the dark coming down at twenty to five.

Her thumb has its own ideas. It goes down the screen, and each time the sofa takes her weight a little more. The boots under the coat are the last thing she wants to look at, so she looks at them.

Rosa is out at her garden plot in weather that would keep a dog indoors. She has a way of saying that rain is only water. Beatriz can hear it without the phone.

She puts on the coat and the boots and goes out.

Twenty minutes, no destination. Round the block, past the garden gate with the padlock on it and Rosa's beans gone black on the poles, and down the steps to the river path. The rain is the fine kind that does not fall so much as arrive. She stands under the tree where the path turns. Across the water, the far bank has taken what light there is – a low grey shine on the warehouses, while her own side is already dark. She watches it go.

The rain gets into her collar. Twenty minutes is twenty minutes.

Back in the flat she hangs the coat on the hook, and the boots go under it. She cuts a piece of Mikolos's cheese from Saturday and eats it standing at the counter, and leaves the rind there. The phone is on the sofa where it fell. It stays there through supper.

 NOTES

Beatriz put on the coat and boots the sofa was replacing and stood under the tree where the path turns while the far bank held what light there was, and came back to a piece of cheese at the counter.

A NOTE FROM US —

Coat and boots on, out for twenty minutes whatever the sky is doing, no destination. It needs a coat that keeps the rain off.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK · OUTDOORS · NEEDS A THING OR TWO

Where this comes from: Scandinavia. Friluftsliv, the open-air life, is the habit of going out into the weather as it is, dressed for it and with no destination; Gelter describes the philosophy and warns that the commercial gear version inverts it. Gelter, 2000.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for anyone without weatherproof clothing, a safe area to walk, or a body a wet twenty minutes will hurt. The gear is not the practice.

Inspired by: Scandinavia, Gelter, 2000.

WEEK 4 · 3

COPER

Separation · Solitude › Success

Constantly then give to thyself this retreat, and renew thyself

— MARCUS AURELIUS

Two, Then a Third

Lucija, this one reached you through fear of missing out. Here is a story about Jade, whose last round of the day happens in bed with the phone and the light still on.

On a night off, Jade brushes her teeth at the kitchen sink, because the bathroom light wakes her mother. She stands there with the phone, doing her last round: the ward group chat, Theo's message from the afternoon, the weather for tomorrow, which she will not be in. Behind her the balcony door is shut. Through the glass there is a smear of orange city, and above it something darker that nobody in this flat has looked at in weeks.

Her teeth are done. The phone is the only thing left in her hand that is not done, because it is never done. She knows the shape of the next twenty minutes the way she knows the shape of a night shift: the sofa, the light on, the thumb. Then getting into bed later than her body wanted, and more awake, waiting for the last Four streetcar to go over the bridge so there is something to hear.

NOTES

It is August. The storm at four came and went and left the river smell coming up through the streets, and the flat is hot and airless.

She puts the phone down on the kitchen table, face down. She turns the light off. She opens the balcony door.

She stands there ten minutes, looking up. There are no stars at first. There is the orange glow, and the lit windows of Riverside across the water, a whole wall of them, somebody awake on every floor. Her eyes take most of the ten minutes to adjust. Then there are two stars, and then a third that is a plane, and then a real third. By the time there is a scatter of them, the ten minutes are nearly up, and her neck says so.

The last Four goes over the bridge and rings twice. For once she hears it from above, and it is a smaller sound out here than in bed.

She goes in. The phone on the table has lit itself once, and she does not turn it over to see who it was. In the bedroom her mother is asleep. Jade gets into bed, and the light is already off, which is new. The ceiling has nothing on it, and that is what she looks at.

Jade stood in the open balcony door and let her eyes take most of the ten minutes to find a real third star, and the last Four went over the bridge and rang twice, a smaller sound out there than it ever is from bed.

A NOTE FROM US —

Put the phone on the kitchen table, turn the light off, open the door and stand ten minutes looking up — no app, no photograph; the eyes take most of the ten to adjust. It needs nothing but a door.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK · OUTDOORS

Where this comes from: the back step at night. Amateur astronomers since the nineteenth century have stood in the dark before looking up, because the eyes need ten minutes without light to see the fainter stars; the wait is the looking. (custom; no single record)

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not past ten minutes — for anyone prone to brooding, dark staring becomes brood time. And not for a low balcony rail or a bitter night.

Inspired by: the back step at night, a custom with no single record.

NOTES

WEEK 4 • 4

ENERGIZER Environment • Energize › Empower

If a man does not make new acquaintance as he advances through life, he will soon find himself left alone.

— SAMUEL JOHNSON

The Cab at Lunch

Lucija, this one reached you through your pull toward social media. Here is a story about Theo, whose lunch hour goes into the feed instead of the thing it was for.

At lunch, the cab of Theo's car — the front seat — is the best room he owns. Seat back, jacket over the sunny window, coffee first and then twenty minutes lying flat, and the warehouse can go on without him. That was July. In September, with the schedules changing every week, the coffee still gets drunk, but then the phone comes out. The twenty minutes go into other people's lunches, and the alarm goes off in his hand with the feed still moving.

He gets out heavier than he got in. He knows this and does it anyway.

Diego brings it to a head without meaning to. Diego does the dock run — the bike, the pannier, the phone clamped to the handlebars. One lunchtime he leans on the open window, looks at the phone and at the seat not put back, and says, "That's me at four o'clock," and is gone before Theo can ask what that means. Theo knows.

He sits with it. The thumb has the app open already; the thumb has opinions. He can feel the small warm slide of it, and under it the older pull, the honest one, toward the dark behind the eyes, toward sleep.

He holds the icon until it shakes and lets it go, and the app is deleted. Then the other one. Then the third.

The account is still there somewhere; the door is not. If he wants to look, he will have to open the browser, remember the password, and log out after. That is a fee, and he is a man who feels a fee. He lays the phone on the dashboard, puts the seat back, and does not quite sleep, but the twenty minutes are his.

On Saturday at the market on Union Square the phone is in his pocket the whole way round. Once, by Mikolos the cheese man, while he waits, his hand goes to it, finds nothing to open, and comes out holding nothing. He buys the last of the peaches, two bags, for his cousin's mother. He has logged in twice all week, both times with the password, both times short, and he counts it as twice and stops counting. He eats one before the streetcar, and the juice goes down his wrist, and he lets it.

 NOTES

Theo held each icon until it shook and let it go, and at the market his hand went to the pocket, found nothing to open, and came out holding nothing.

A NOTE FROM US —

Delete the feed apps and keep the accounts. When a visit is wanted, it is the browser, log in, look, log out. It needs nothing.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING

Where this comes from: smartphone users of the 2010s. A common practice of deleting the feed apps and keeping only the mobile browser, logged out, so that every visit costs a login and ends when it is closed. (custom; no single record)

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for anyone whose codes and passwords already trip up the day's real business — the friction spills onto the bank login.

Inspired by: smartphone users of the 2010s, a custom with no single record.

WEEK 4 · 5

ENERGIZER Environment · Energize › Empower

Men exist for the sake of one another.

— MARCUS AURELIUS

The Blank Box

Lucija, this one reached you through comparing yourself to others. Here is a story about Walt, whose day begins with the news, and again with the news, before it has begun with anything else.

Walt walked every street on the north side of the river for thirty-four years, delivering the post. Now he rides out to the end of the subway line once a week, with a smaller bag and a flask. In March the first birds come in to Heron Flats on the wind. He is in the plywood bird hide, with the window slat hooked up, before it is light. It is the best hour of his week. It has a rival: five o'clock in the kitchen with the phone. The news comes down unasked and keeps coming. He turns the wheel of it with his thumb, and turns it, and then it is six, and the light has come without him.

Amir's message is there under the news: heron back below the bridge, standing like a man who's decided to miss the bus. That is what he keeps opening it for: Amir, and the old friend from the post office. And the feed arrives underneath every time, uninvited, like a man who follows you home from the pub.

NOTES

In the hide the marsh is grey, and then it is not. The first flight of birds comes in low from the east. He writes his two lines in the log, the date and the count, and reaches for the phone. His thumb is turning the wheel before the screen is even on. He watches it do that, his own thumb, at seventy-seven, and does not think much of it.

He goes into the account and starts unfollowing everything. Page by page, in the hide, with the birds coming in.

It takes most of the flask. When it is done he turns the wheel once, and nothing comes. The box where the news lived is a blank white box. Amir's message is still there, and the friend's, and that is all the machine holds now. He misses it, and does not pretend otherwise.

On the last train back, the phone stays in the bag for the whole line. It has not done that in a year. He notices that once, and lets it go. At Northside the light is still up. He walks home the long way, by the bridge, to look at the heron.

Walt unfollowed everything page by page in the hide with the birds coming in, and on the last train back the phone stayed in the bag for the whole line.

A NOTE FROM US —

Empty the feed and keep the people — a feed-blanking extension, or unfollow until the box is blank; messages still work. It needs twenty minutes.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING

Where this comes from: the browser. Since 2012 an extension called News Feed Eradicator has blanked the social feed while messages keep working. In 2023 Purohit and colleagues tested that strict diet, unfollowing everything, in a two-week field trial with 138 Facebook users: time on Facebook fell by about two thirds against control. Purohit et al., 2023.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for anyone whose job is watching the feed. It is hard at first for those who fear missing out — the blank box shows the cost.

Inspired by: the browser, Purohit et al., 2023 — Purohit, A. K., Bergram, K., Barclay, L., Bezençon, V., Holzer, A., “Starving the Newsfeed for Social Media Detox: Effects of Strict and Self-regulated Facebook Newsfeed Diets” (2023).

NOTES

WEEK 4 • 6

COPER Separation • Solitude › Success

*For solitude sometimes is best society,
And short retirement urges sweet return.*

— JOHN MILTON

The Back Car

Lucija, this one reached you through fear of missing out. Here is a story about Owen, who spends the first hour of his day inside the phone, and arrives with the morning already spent.

In July the commuter train out of Union is a train of fans: folding ones, paper ones, and one man with a battery fan clipped to his collar. Everyone is looking down into a phone as if the phone were the cool place. Owen is one of them, twice a week, on the 7:48. The forty minutes of the ride are his first hour of the day: email, the queue of work tickets, the notes for the team meeting, the news. All of it happens in a hand that is also holding a rail. He arrives at his desk with the morning already spent, and has to go looking for another one.

The last car is the quiet car, where nobody talks. He has known this for two years and never once sat in it. The last car means walking to the far end of the platform, and quiet sounds like a rule for other people.

It is Frank who puts him there, though Frank would not say so. Frank is the old railwayman everyone on the 7:48 knows by sight: the paper under his arm, always in the back car. Today the front cars are full to the doors. Frank, passing Owen on the platform, says only, "Back one's empty," and keeps walking. And Owen, for no reason he could give Hana that evening, follows him.

Inside there are eleven people and no sound but the fans. Owen sits by the window with the phone out and the mail open. He reads the first line of the first message twice. Then he feels the car around him not reading. The woman opposite has her eyes closed. Frank has the paper folded to the crossword and is not doing it. The phone in his hand becomes a slightly loud thing to be holding.

He puts it in the bag, and zips the bag.

After that nothing happens, and that is all. The backs of houses go by. A bend of the river has light on it. A heron stands in the shallow water, grey on grey, and does not move. The car rocks. Owen looks out of the window for thirty-one minutes. He gets off at the far end with the day still in his pocket, unspent. He carries it up the stairs into the heat.

 NOTES

Owen followed Frank into the quiet car and zipped the phone into the bag – and he got off with the day still in his pocket, unspent.

A NOTE FROM US –

Take the quiet car and sit in it. Nobody enforces the rule – it holds only because the people in it are keeping it, and that is enough to make a phone feel loud in the hand. The phone goes zipped into the bag, and the headphones go in with it. It needs nothing but the ticket.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: the railway. On British, Dutch, Danish and German trains one coach is marked quiet – no calls, no music, low voices – and it is the passengers, not the staff, who keep it so. (custom; no single record)

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for anyone off the rail network – a bus keeps no such rule. On a day when enforced idleness sets the mind racing, a paper book is allowed. And the carriage may not be there much longer: operators are withdrawing it.

Inspired by: the railway, a custom with no single record.

 NOTES

SIX COFFEES

Week 5

This week: still small, and a step further from the desk – a walk, a wall, a door.

WEEK 5 · 1

COPER

Nourishment · Nurture › Natural

Sleep is that golden chain that ties health and our bodies together.

– THOMAS DEKKER

The Blind Half Down

Lucija, this one reached you through your body and its needs. Here is a story about Rosa, whose energy goes flat at the same hour every afternoon, and who spends that hour on the sofa with the feed instead of in bed.

July sits on Northside like a lid. By early afternoon the row house holds the heat the way a pot holds soup. Rosa's afternoon goes flat in the usual place: the kitchen chair, the fan, the garden plot out back going brown where she has not been. The phone offers the other kind of lying down: flat on the sofa with the feed moving and the beans unwatered. Twenty minutes turn into fifty and leave her heavier and duller than they found her. It is her cousin's fault, mostly, for the videos.

In the back room the blind is half down, and the alarm clock on the windowsill has not been wound since the last power cut. Her husband bought it. It has a bell on top like a bicycle's.

She has been doing the lie-down for a week now, and her body knows the hour before she does. Her feet start looking toward the back room. But the phone is in her hand, the sofa is right there, and the videos are open – her cousin's grandchildren in a pool. The beans would forgive her; they always do.

She puts the phone on the kitchen table, face up, where it can shout all it likes.

Blind the rest of the way down. Clock wound, set for twenty minutes. Flat on the bed, shoes off, hands on her stomach like a woman laid out. She says that to herself every day, and it is funny every day. She sleeps or she does not; the rule does not care. Today she does not – the fan, a bus, a child somewhere refusing something. Then the bell. She is up on the first ring, because that is the rule too, and the clock goes back on the windowsill for tomorrow.

NOTES

After four the heat lets go a little. She is at the plot with the watering can, and the beans get their water. It is Wednesday, so the six bells of St. Anne's come over the railway cut – bell practice, going round and going wrong. Ben goes by with the dog, and the dog strains at the fence to be told hello.

"You've caught the sun," Ben says.

"Twenty minutes," Rosa says. The dog gets her hand through the wire, which is what it came for.

Rosa traded the sofa and the videos for a real lie-down with the clock set – and after it the beans got their water.

A NOTE FROM US —

Keep the same early-afternoon hour daily. Blind down, clock set for twenty minutes, phone in the other room. Lie flat, and get up on the first ring. It needs a dark room with a door.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK · NEEDS A BLOCK OF
TIME · NEEDS A PRIVATE MOMENT

Where this comes from: Greece. Most adults there reported a habit of lying down at midday, nearly four in five men and two in three women in one large national cohort, the day cut in two by the nap. Naska et al., 2007.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for anyone with insomnia — the nap is taken out of the night's sleep. And it needs a private dark room in the early afternoon, which most jobs lack.

Inspired by: Greece, Naska et al., 2007.

 NOTES

WEEK 5 · 2

COPER Alertness · Awe › Achievement

The first principle is that you must not fool yourself—and you are the easiest person to fool.

— RICHARD P. FEYNMAN

The Empty Hook

Lucija, this one reached you through life beyond the screen. Here is a story about Ben, whose walks happen with a voice in each ear talking about being better at work.

Ben walks Biscuit, the dog, because Lily cannot yet. The weekend walk is always the same walk: down to the river path, along past the studio building, up to the bakery on Northside for the loaf, and home. In October the path is under leaves, and by four the first frost has come and gone. Ben walks it fast. The podcast about being better at work is already queued, his thumb over the play button, and the dog knows the route well enough to be the one walking him.

The crane over the building site by the studio has been there since August. Nobody looks at it. It holds an empty hook over four streets, and Ben has walked under it forty times.

At the door, Lily has the leash in her fist, because she is the one who hands it over. She says, "Biscuit's bored of the river. Take him somewhere he hasn't been." He says the river is where the bakery is. She says that is not the point, and shuts the door.

His thumb is on the button. The first words are in his ear – a man saying that the difference between good and great – and the hook is above him, not moving. Beyond it, the sky over the roofs is doing something large and grey and gold, and nobody has asked his opinion.

He takes the earbud out. He gives the walk a different job.

For fifteen minutes he looks for what is bigger than him, or what he does not understand. The crane, and how it stays up. The river wall, which is older than the city that thinks it owns it. The weather, coming over the roofs from the west in one piece. When something catches his eye, he stops and lets it, and Biscuit stops with him, puzzled but willing.

At the studio building Hana is out on the loading dock with clay up to the elbow, looking at the same sky. She lifts one grey hand.

He is smaller by the time he reaches Northside, in the way big things make a person feel small. That is how he would put it if pressed, and nobody presses. The bakery smell comes down the street to meet him a block early. He buys the loaf. On the way home Biscuit pulls toward the river, and gets it.

 NOTES

 NOTES

ONE SITTING · COMES BACK · OUTDOORS · NEEDS A BLOCK OF TIME

COPER Separation · Solitude › Success

— JOHN MILTON

At home the bag goes on the hall chair. It has gone there every Friday for two years, unzipped, with one corner of the laptop screen showing. It sits there through the weekend like a guest who has not been asked to stay and has not been asked to go. Saturday has no shape, so the work in the bag is what she does, in pieces, a corner at a time.

Her older child, drying the dishes, says it to the window. "Is the weekend a weekend or not."

Lena has an answer for that. She has had it for two years. She opens her mouth to give it, but the bag is behind her on the chair like a person reading over her shoulder, and the answer does not come.

"Noon to noon, Saturday to Sunday. The bag goes in the cupboard and nobody opens it, me included. House rule, from tomorrow. Yes or no."

The younger one says yes because the older one hasn't yet. The older one says she'll open it. Lena says then he can tell her so when she does. That is his job.

On Saturday at noon she zips the bag, puts it in the hall cupboard, and shuts the door. Both children watch her do it, which is the point.

It rains all afternoon. They walk to the shops in it anyway. Coming back over the bridge, the Four goes past and rings twice. The older one says the streetcar is louder in the rain. Lena, who has not thought about a spreadsheet in three hours, says it is, it is louder in the rain. On Sunday at noon the bag comes out of the cupboard. The screen has nothing on it that could not wait, and the older one is standing in the hall to see.

Lena zipped the bag at noon on Saturday and shut it in the hall cupboard with both children watching, and coming back over the bridge she had not thought about a spreadsheet in three hours.

A NOTE FROM US —

Pick one twenty-four-hour window a week — noon to noon, or sundown to sundown — and agree it out loud so it is the house's rule, the bag zipped away in a cupboard. It needs nothing but a household that agrees.

NOTHING TO BUY · COMES BACK · ONE OTHER PERSON · NEEDS A BLOCK OF TIME

Where this comes from: the sabbath. For thousands of years, observant households have kept one fixed day a week, sundown to sundown, in which no work is done; the rule is the household's and the community's, so nobody decides it alone. (custom; no single record)

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for shift workers, whose week does not fold that way. Alone it is much weaker — a stop-day nobody else keeps breaks at the first message. And the old form was not structure instead of religion: where the stop-day was law it was enforced, with fines and with jail.

Inspired by: the sabbath, a custom with no single record.

NOTES

WEEK 5 · 4

ENERGIZER Meaning · Momentum › Mastery

There is nothing like employment, active indispensable employment, for relieving sorrow.

— JANE AUSTEN

The Lead on the Hook

Lucija, this one reached you through what keeps you going. Here is a story about Nate, whose phone does the work of company on a Saturday morning.

Nate's neighbour across the hall keeps her door open a crack for the post. Behind the crack, in May, there is a dog. It is looking at its lead on the hook inside the door with the fixed attention of something that has understood the situation. The neighbour has been on crutches since Tuesday. Nate knows this because he carried her shopping up and was thanked more than the shopping deserved.

He is at his own table with the coffee and the phone, and the morning has no shape. The paper comes later, from Ray. Halloran's on Tuesday is a long way off. Meanwhile there is the feed, which is company of a kind, the kind that never asks how you are. Across the hall the dog's nails go once on the floor and stop.

He puts his head round her door. "You need anything."

She says the dog needs walking, and that she has been going round the block on the crutches. He hears himself say he'll see about it, and goes back to his table. The phone is in his hand before he has sat down, and the dog is still looking at the lead.

He goes back and takes the lead off the hook. "Saturdays. Eight. Half an hour. Same as this, every week."

At that hour the river path is grey-green and flat, and the light on the water has not yet decided. A heron stands in the shallow water with its neck put away, like something left out overnight and not yet collected. Ben comes the other way at his usual pace with his own dog. He looks at Nate's dog, looks at Nate, and says, "Borrowed," the way he might say rain, and Nate says it is. Over the bridge the Four streetcar goes by and rings twice.

Half an hour, and back, and the lead on its hook. He has walked before nine on a Saturday, which has not happened since the divorce; he does not think further about it.

At the newsstand Ray hands him the paper, looks at the dog hair on his trousers, and says nothing, which from Ray is a remark.

 NOTES

Nate took the lead off the hook and said Saturdays, eight, half an hour, and he had walked before nine on a Saturday for the first time since the divorce.

A NOTE FROM US —

Take one fixed slot for somebody else's dog — the same day, the same time, the lead off the hook. It needs half an hour outdoors, and the owner's say-so.

NOTHING TO BUY · COMES BACK · ONE OTHER PERSON · OUTDOORS

Where this comes from: animal shelters and the family dog. Shelters run walking rosters in which a volunteer holds one fixed slot, and in dog-owning homes one person takes the daily walk because the animal needs it. (custom; no single record)

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Do not acquire a dog for this — that is years of cost, not a tactic. Not for allergies or a fear of dogs, and an unreliable walker harms the dog.

Inspired by: animal shelters and the family dog, a custom with no single record.

WEEK 5 · 5

COPER

Nourishment · Nurture › Natural

The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much.

— ECCLESIASTES

The Week of Dresses

Lucija, this one reached you through your body and its needs. Here is a story about Hallida, whose busiest week of the year gets paid for out of her nights.

June is when the brides find Hallida. The order book on the kitchen shelf goes from a page a week to a page a day: three wedding gowns to take in, a jacket with beadwork at the cuffs, hems, a veil somebody's grandmother wore in another country. All of it is wanted for the last weekend of the month. She has done this season before. She knows its shape: four days of sewing that will not fit inside four days.

At the Saturday market she is buying thread and not much else when Ada turns one of her seams over, approves it, and looks at her the way seamstresses look at cloth that has been asked to do too much. "You're planning to sew that week on no sleep," Ada says. "I did thirty years of that. Buy the sleep first, like buttons. It's the one thing you can get in ahead."

The evenings are the problem, because the evenings are hers. The orders arrive at ten, and her thumb answers them from bed. The small bright rectangle gives her back the one hour when nobody in the house wants anything. That is the trade, and she has always paid it.

NOTES

That week she goes up to bed at nine.

Amir takes the children and their noise into the far room. The phone sleeps in the kitchen drawer with the receipts. Through the open window the warm evening goes on without her. For the first two nights she lies in the dark feeling foolish, like a woman hoarding water in the rain.

Then the week of dresses comes, and it is exactly as long as she feared. But her hands stay ahead of the needle through the fourth short night, in a way they did not last year. Only near the end can she feel the loan of sleep running out, the borrowed hours going home to be slept properly. Some debts cannot be paid in advance forever.

The veil goes out on Saturday morning, and she walks back through the market slowly, past the flowers, buying nothing, owing nobody.

Hallida went up at nine while the warm evening went on without her, feeling like a woman hoarding water in the rain, and through the week of dresses her hands stayed ahead of the needle, and she walked back through the market slowly, owing nobody.

A NOTE FROM US —

Before a week that will be short of sleep, go to bed early for several nights and bank it, rather than catching up after. It needs quiet evenings.

NEEDS A BLOCK OF TIME

Where this comes from: an army sleep laboratory. In a study where people spent extra hours in bed for several nights before a short-sleep stretch, the measure was how the banked sleep carried them through it and the recovery after. Rupp et al., 2009.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for those who cannot sleep more in advance — shift workers, the sleepless, carers of infants — and they need it most.

Inspired by: an army sleep laboratory, Rupp et al., 2009 — Rupp T. L., Wesensten N. J., Bliese P. D., Balkin T. J., “Banking sleep: Realization of benefits during subsequent sleep restriction and recovery” (2009).

NOTES

WEEK 5 · 6

COPER Separation · Solitude › Success*The greatest thing in the world is for a man to know that he is his own.*

— MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

Stem Down

Lucija, this one reached you through fear of missing out. Here is a story about Dario, whose day arrives through the phone in the cup holder before he has looked at it.

Dario lives at the end of the state forest road, in a house that smells of the van. This October morning the basket is by the door, with the knife in it and the boots beside it. It has rained three days this week. That means mushrooms under the oaks. Outside the window the mist is down in the trees, and the light, what there is, is the colour of wet stone.

Most mornings begin in the van, with the phone in the cup holder lighting up with the day's plumbing jobs. The day is set before he has looked at it. Sunday has no van. It has the mushroom group chat instead, already going, with a photograph of somebody's basket that he does not believe.

He calls his sister Kasia. She answers on a moving streetcar. Behind her voice the Four rings twice, going over the bridge, so he knows exactly where she is.

"The oaks. Back by eleven."

"Cut, don't pull," she says, which is what their mother said, and hangs up.

The phone goes in his coat, for the map and nothing else. He nearly takes it out again at the gate. The chat has moved on, he can feel it. But he does not.

He goes into the forest.

The forest in mist is a smaller place, a room at a time. He walks slowly, eyes down, and his eyes take a while to adjust. First he sees leaves, then the shapes under the leaves. Then, at the foot of the third big oak, he sees the brown caps pushed up through the fallen leaves like knuckles. He cuts them low, does not pull, and lays them in the basket stem down. The search sets the pace. The season set the day.

By half past nine the basket is a third full. He does not check the phone for the time because the light tells him.

Kasia gets them on Wednesday and takes them down to Jonah, the cook at the Kitchen, who pays her in cash and a meal. What Dario gets is the smell of the van on Monday, and under it, still in his coat, the smell of oak.

 NOTES

Dario said the oaks and eleven to Kasia and went in with the phone in the coat for the map only, and by half past nine the basket was a third full, stem down.

A NOTE FROM US —

Say the route and the hour back to someone, then go alone, phone in the coat for the map and nothing else, eyes down — cut, do not pull. It needs a basket, a knife, and a morning.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK · OUTDOORS · NEEDS A BLOCK OF TIME

Where this comes from: the woods of Slavic and Nordic Europe. In season, people walk out with a basket for mushrooms, berries and wild greens, a habit ethnobotanists record as fading in places and changing shape elsewhere. Łuczaj et al., 2012.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for eating anything unverified — mushroom poisoning is lethal, and an identification course comes first. Not for going off-trail alone with nobody told; ticks come with it.

Inspired by: the woods of Slavic and Nordic Europe, Łuczaj et al., 2012.

 NOTES

SIX COFFEES

The shelf

For the days you want something else: six built on what already works – not a need, an offer.

THE SHELF · 1

COPER

Focus · Filter › Flow, Nourishment · Nurture › Natural

Early to bed, and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.

— BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

The Crane Lights

Lucija, this one comes from the steadier part of your reading. Here is a story about Leo, who likes giving his eyes the longest view there is.

The Finnish Hall keeps its sauna at the heat of a good argument. Leo has his place on the middle bench, between two men who prefer not to talk. In July fewer people come. Half the regulars have moved their souls to the pier, where the hour before six is the only cool one going. But the stove takes no notice of July, and the man feeding it takes no notice of anything.

Between sets in the heat, Leo steps out of the side door with a towel around him and the evening on his skin. He does the thing he would not skip: the finding.

He finds the furthest thing he can see. It is a coaching habit that followed him home. He tells his sprinters their eyes live too close, on ten feet of running track. He marches them to the fence to pick out the water tower. One summer he noticed he had started doing it to himself. From the hall's side steps there is plenty to choose from: the railway cut, the rooflines, the gap where the river runs. Tonight the winner is the crane lights across the river, red and patient, a constellation somebody is being paid by the hour to build.

He lets his eyes sit on them. Nothing happens, which is what the eyes wanted. The far lights ride the heat shimmer like buoys on the water.

The door opens behind him. One of the men who prefer not to talk comes out and follows Leo's line of sight. He gives the cranes a long professional look, as if pricing the job.

"Far bank," the man says, approvingly, and goes back in. By the standards of the middle bench, that is a hug.

NOTES

Some mornings Leo does his finding at the pier in the cool hour. There the two gulls, which appear to be the same two gulls, hold the rail like management, and the furthest thing is the far bank itself. Here it is the cranes. The city keeps him supplied.

He takes the last set hot and dries off on the porch with his eyes on the far view. Then he drives home to Priya, with the cranes still lit behind him.

Leo stepped out between sets and let his eyes sit on the crane lights across the river, and nothing happened, which is what the eyes wanted.

A NOTE FROM US —

Between one thing and the next, find the furthest thing you can see and let your eyes rest on it for a few breaths. It needs a window or a door.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: optometry. Eye clinicians tell people doing close screen work to look at something far away for a short spell at set intervals; the one trial of the rule's timings found no change in eye complaints or reading. Johnson and Rosenfield, 2023.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for anyone without sight — an ear on the furthest sound instead.

Inspired by: optometry, Johnson and Rosenfield, 2023.

THE SHELF • 2

COPER Focus · Filter › Flow

When I dance, I dance; when I sleep, I sleep.

— MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

Where She Left It

Lucija, this one comes from the steadier part of your reading. Here is a story about Hana, who likes leaving a door ajar on purpose and closing it herself in the morning.

Hana's studio keeps shopkeeper's hours, and the last of them belongs to the notepad that hangs on a nail by the door. Whatever the clay was doing when the hour struck, she writes the next move's first words on it – trim the foot ring, wax the rims. She does this before she washes her hands. Then she goes home with the door, so to speak, left open a crack on purpose.

In February the light comes back a minute a day. The river outside the window does its thaw and freeze, thaw and freeze, like someone learning a piece of music one bar at a time.

 NOTES

This time the job is the lobby commission: a shelf of big bowls for the tall glass building on Ferry Street. They are due at the end of the month. That means a delivery trip on the early train out of Union, with a crate on her knees. She rides in the last car, which is the quiet one and knows it. At home the arrangement is considered funny. "You write yourself notes like a milkman," her partner says.

"The milkman never wondered where to start," she says.

The trip eats the day: the crate, the lobby, the man from the building committee who wants the bowls moved twice and then moved back. She gets home late and eats standing up. She does not go near the studio, because the studio is closed and the pad is looking after it.

In the morning she unlocks and reads the pad on the nail. Wax the rims, water at blood warmth. Her hands know the sentence before her head has finished it. There is no standing in the doorway deciding, no little tour of the shelves to remember what she meant. The wax is on and half the rims are done before the first pull toward anywhere-else arrives. By then it is too late to matter — the work has her.

At noon she writes the next line before lunch, out of pleasure now rather than method. It is the way a person whistles a tune they already own. The pad fills up sideways, a winter of first words, and she keeps every used page, though she could not say for whom.

Hana wrote the next move's first words on the pad by the door before washing her hands, and in the morning her hands knew the sentence before her head had finished it, and the work had her before anywhere-else arrived.

A NOTE FROM US —

Before you leave the work, write the next step's first few words where you will see them on return. It needs a pencil.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: a workplace laboratory. In experiments where people were interrupted mid-task, those who first wrote a brief ready-to-resume plan carried less of the interrupted task into the next one and performed better on it. Leroy and Glomb, 2018.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for the small switches — the refilled cup, the one-word answer — where writing the line costs more than the switch does.

Inspired by: a workplace laboratory, Leroy and Glomb, 2018 — Leroy, S., "Why is it so hard to do my work? The challenge of attention residue when switching between work tasks" (2009); Leroy, S., Glomb, T. M., "Tasks interrupted: How anticipating time pressure on resumption of an interrupted task causes attention residue and low performance on interrupting tasks, and how a ready-to-resume plan mitigates the effects" (2018); Leroy S., Schmidt A. M., Madjar N., "Interruptions and Task Transitions: Understanding Their Characteristics, Processes, and Consequences" (2020).

NOTES

THE SHELF · 3

COPER Focus · Filter › Flow

Everywhere means nowhere.

— SENECA

Faders Down

Lucija, this one comes from the steadier part of your reading. Here is a story about Dev, who likes a first move so worn in that it needs no deciding.

Most evenings Dev has an hour in the old warehouse on the river path, in the smallest room upstairs, where somebody's band leaves its cables coiled like sleeping animals. He is not in the band. He mixes their sound for them – badly at first, and now not badly – and the hour is what he gives himself after a day of index cards and Portuguese verbs that will not stay conjugated.

April has been rain and then the first green in the roof gutters, and the blossom down on the path is spending its four days. The bassist comes early to wait out a shower. She sits on the arm of the sofa with her jacket still on, watching him not start.

Because Dev does not start. He does the approach, which takes about as long as filling a kettle. He pulls the chair to the same distance from the desk. Hands flat, one breath out. Every fader down to nothing – a fader is a sliding volume control – which undoes the whole of yesterday and is meant to. Then the kick drum comes up first, always the kick, until it can be felt in the arms of the chair.

"You could just press play," the bassist says, friendly about it.

"This is the pressing play," Dev says, and brings the bass up underneath, and the room does the thing the room does.

Nothing in the approach is clever, and he would not claim otherwise. It is the same few moves in the same order. Their whole value, as far as he can tell, is that there is no decision anywhere inside them. By the time the kick is loud he is already in the work, and the part of him that likes to weigh things has been left out in the corridor with its coat on.

The bassist stops waiting for the rain and stays for the mix. The Four goes over the Ferry Street bridge and rings twice, which is the streetcar saying half past something. Dev, coming back up to the surface, cannot remember hearing it pass the other way.

 NOTES

Dev pulled the chair to the same distance, took every fader down to nothing and brought the kick up first, and by the time it was loud the work had him, the weighing part of him left out in the corridor with its coat on.

A NOTE FROM US —

Open the work with the same short sequence every time, so worn in that there is no decision anywhere inside it. It needs nothing.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: sport. Across 112 pooled measurements of athletes who ran a fixed routine before the serve, the kick or the putt, performance improved for beginners and elites alike, under low and high pressure, whatever the routine's shape. Rupperecht, Tran and Gröpel, 2021.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for anyone whose rituals already run them — a sequence like this can harden into superstition, and the day it cannot be done goes badly.

Inspired by: sport, Rupperecht, Tran and Gröpel, 2021 — Rupperecht A. G. O., Tran U. S., Gröpel P., "The effectiveness of pre-performance routines in sports: a meta-analysis" (2021).

THE SHELF · 4

COPER

Focus · Filter › Flow

It is not enough to be industrious; so are the ants. What are you industrious about?

— HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Returns First

Lucija, this one comes from the steadier part of your reading. Here is a story about Sofia, who likes hearing the next thing named before she does it.

The issues desk at the main library, where books go out and come back, has a brass edge worn soft as butter. Two evenings a month it is Sofia's. She is a lawyer. The volunteer shift is the one appointment in her week that could not matter less to a court, which is exactly its value. The reading room's green lamps come on even in June, when the sky stays pale past closing. The bells carry in off the river if the wind agrees.

Tonight the trolley is a big one: returns, reservations, and a box of donated books. Somebody left the box on the step like a baby left at a door. The new volunteer looks at it with the expression Sofia once brought to her first deposition.

NOTES

Sofia says, to nobody, at desk volume, "Returns first, then the reservations." Then she does the returns.

It is an old librarians' habit. The woman who trained the volunteers did it all shift, a low running commentary like a pilot's, and Sofia caught it without meaning to. The sentence walks ahead of her, and she follows it. Said aloud, the next thing stops being one of fourteen things on a list; it is the only thing in the room with a voice.

"Doesn't it feel odd, talking to a desk?" the new volunteer says.

"The desk started it," Sofia says, and shelves on.

She has her theories about the city. Bernice on the Four does it every morning – mind the step, sweetheart, to bishops and toddlers alike – and the step, Sofia notes, gets minded. Half the town is being steered by people saying the next thing out loud, and she has simply kept up her corner of the practice.

The returns go down. The reservations go up. The donation box gives up a good atlas, which she sets aside for the desk to argue about on a night she is not here.

At closing she stands on the steps in the long pale evening, says, "Home, then the fish," and goes, obediently, to buy the fish.

Sofia said returns first, then the reservations, to nobody, at desk volume, and shelved behind the sentence, and at closing she said home, then the fish, and went, obediently, to buy the fish.

A NOTE FROM US —

Say the next step out loud, at desk volume, and follow it — the sentence walks ahead of you. It needs nothing.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: Japanese railways. Drivers and platform staff point at the signal, the gauge or the door and call out what they see before acting on it, on every run; the production-effect memory experiments are related reading. (custom; no single record)

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for a shared office where talking to nobody feels exposing — for some autistic and socially anxious adults it costs more than it gives. Mouth it, or skip.

Inspired by: Japanese railways, a custom with no single record.

NOTES

THE SHELF · 5

COPER Focus · Filter › Flow

A small daily task, if it be really daily, will beat the labours of a spasmodic Hercules.

— ANTHONY TROLLOPE

One Window

Lucija, this one comes from the steadier part of your reading. Here is a story about Jonah, who likes a work surface with nothing on it he did not put there.

Jonah teaches an evening cooking class at Northside High, in a home economics room that smells of the last thing anybody burned. There are a dozen adults, each with a stove top, and each hands in a week's write-up on paper. He asked for it on paper, and nobody argued. The marking gets done at the back table of the school kitchen. He does it with one window open on the laptop and nothing else.

One tab. It is a rule the way his station in the kitchen is a rule. Everything is laid out before the first order ticket, and nothing is behind him that he has not already seen.

November is rain, and dark long before the class ends. The caretaker has a bunch of keys. He shakes them at about the hour a man would like to be sitting down, which gives the marking its edges. Tonight there is a complication. One of the students has sent the write-up by mail instead, with an apology and a photograph of a pan.

Jonah opens the mail, saves the file, closes the mail. Then he opens the file. That is the whole of the rule, and it takes a second and a half. The second and a half is the only place in the evening where the evening could have gone somewhere else.

He marks. The pile goes down at the speed piles go down when there is nothing else in the room. A woman has written out her mother's stew properly, including the part where you leave it alone and do not stir it. Jonah puts a line in the margin saying she could sell that.

The keys arrive at the door, and he is already stacking. He walks home in the rain with the pile buttoned inside his coat. St. Anne's is at bell practice, the bells coming down through the wet air one over another, with a couple of them arriving late. He is indoors with the kettle on while his hands are still cold from the gate.

 NOTES

Jonah opened the mail, saved the file, closed the mail, then opened the file, and the pile went down at the speed piles go down when there is nothing else in the room, and he was stacking when the keys arrived.

A NOTE FROM US —

Keep one window open for the job in hand and the rest shut; when something arrives, save it, close where it came from, then open it. It needs nothing.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: attention research. Heavy media multitaskers filtered out distractions worse; switching away from unfinished work left a residue that dragged on the next task; interrupted work got done faster but with more stress; the one-tab rule itself was not tested. Ophir et al., 2009; Leroy, 2009; Mark et al., 2008.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for work that genuinely needs many windows — dispatch, a support desk, anything live.

Inspired by: attention research, Ophir et al., 2009; Leroy, 2009; Mark et al., 2008 — Leroy, S., “Why is it so hard to do my work? The challenge of attention residue when switching between work tasks” (2009); Ophir, E., Nass, C., Wagner, A. D., “Cognitive control in media multitaskers” (2009); Mark, G., Gudith, D., Klocke, U., “The cost of interrupted work: More speed and stress” (2008).

THE SHELF · 6

COPER

Focus · Filter › Flow

For the great doesn't happen through impulse alone, and is a succession of little things that are brought together.

— VINCENT VAN GOGH

The Capped Pen

Lucija, this one comes from the steadier part of your reading. Here is a story about Claire, who likes to find, the next day, that the first move is already made.

By evening the salt on the sidewalks crunches under every step. Claire's walk home has a warm stop in the middle of it: Ferry Street Kitchen. It is small and half full, and the counter where the cooks hand out the plates faces the street, so the cooking is the entertainment. In January she takes the table for two by the window. She orders the soup without asking what it is, and gets out her notepad.

NOTES

The notepad holds the February work schedule: who covers whom, who is on call, the yearly negotiation with the calendar, all of it in pencil. It is work she could do at her desk. She prefers to do it here, where nobody can find her and the soup sets a deadline.

Outside, the Four streetcar crosses the bridge and rings twice, as it always rings twice, coming and going. She works through two crossings. Somewhere in the third she reaches the part of the evening she is quietly proudest of, which is the stopping.

The rule is old and it is hers: stop while the next entry is still known. Not at the bottom of a page, and not at a tidy break. The tidy breaks are the ones that start cold the next day, like a car left out overnight. She stops mid-column, with the next entry still in her head – nights, cover, ask first. She caps the pen and lets the click of the cap be the whole ceremony.

Tomorrow the notepad will start itself. The known entry goes in, the entry pulls the column, and the column pulls the morning behind it like a train pulling its cars. She once tried explaining this at work, and people took it as a charming odd habit. That suited her fine: once you share a rule, other people start checking it.

The soup bowl goes back clean. The Four rings twice on its way out. She leaves the tip under the salt shaker and steps into the snow, the capped pen in her coat pocket and the next entry still known.

Claire stopped mid-column with the next entry still known and capped the pen, and stepped into the snow with the pen in her coat pocket.

A NOTE FROM US —

Stop while you still know the next entry, and let the click of the cap be the whole ceremony. It needs nothing.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: a working habit writers have described for a century — stopping while you still know the next sentence. Hemingway put it in his own words in an interview; nothing here was measured.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for anyone in whom an open sentence runs all evening. And it fights with an end-of-day shutdown ritual — pick one of the two.

Inspired by: a novelist's desk, a custom with no single record.

 NOTES

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The thirty-six, at a glance

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Thirty-six titles, week by week — tick them off, or don't. Page numbers are for the printed edition; on the phone, each story starts on its own screen.

WHO YOU MET

The people in these stories

The city in these thirty-six is one city — the Four rings twice on the bridge in every story that crosses it. Here are the people you met, and how they know each other. None of them is real; all of them are written for you.

Ada, 61 — retired seamstress; knits in the chair by the lamp. Grace — friend; Elena — did alterations for the shop for years; Hallida — asks her about seams

Grace, 72 — retired librarian; tower captain at St. Anne's. Frank — neighbour across the landing; quiet-car regular; Dev — she still knows the reading room staff; noticed him; Ada — old friend; knits with her

Mei, 44 — engineer; mentor in the youth scheme. Tyler — mentee; Dev — mentored him years ago; Leo — Tyler's teacher

Tyler, 14 — eighth grade; the youth club bench. Mei — mentor; Leo — teacher

Leo, 41 — high-school history teacher, coaches track. Priya — wife; Maya — sister; Denise — her son runs the 800 for him; Tyler — in his class

Nina, 29 — nurse in another city; calls on Sundays when the shift allows. Ray — father; Jade — nursing school friend — the link back to the city

Ray, 58 — runs the newsstand under 600 Ferry, nineteen years. Nina — daughter, in another city; Elena — landlady and friend; Sunday table; Maya — regular; the weed; Frank — buys the paper at 6:05, every day

Elena, 52 — owns Elena's Cleaners. Tomas — husband; Ray — tenant, friend, Sunday table; Beatriz — sister-in-law; Rosa — buys her beans; Hallida — the difficult jackets

Diego, 30 — bike courier; the whole city in a day. Amir — the trunk; Ruth — the bags; Jonah — delivers to the Kitchen

Marcus, 26 — barista at Ferry Street Café; plays bass in a band. Jonah — shares the alley; trades coffee for staff meal; Ivy — regular; talks about the sky; Maya — knows her order; Ethan — school friend

Tomas, 63 — retired machinist; Engine Company 9 volunteer; Finnish Hall sauna Thursdays. Elena — wife; Frank — sauna bench; Walt — old friend from the post; Ethan — the young volunteer; the rig check card

Jonah, 33 — chef at Ferry Street Kitchen. Marcus — the alley; Kasia — buys her mushrooms in October; Dario — Kasia's brother; the mushrooms come through Kasia

Priya, 38 — architect, works from the kitchen table. Leo — husband; Hana — friend from the studio building; coffee on Fridays

 NOTES

Maya, 34 — financial analyst, sixth floor, 600 Ferry. Ray — buys the same gum every morning; small talk about the weed; Denise — colleague, desk opposite; Leo — brother; Priya — sister-in-law; Sofia — same subway car, nodding acquaintance

Amir, 40 — rideshare driver; fishes Pier 6 at dawn. Ben — dawn nod; Walt — the heron; Diego — picked him up once with the bike in the trunk; Hallida — wife; the hour he names is written on the fridge

Kasia, 45 — hospital lab technician; Polish-born; forages in October; cooks her mother's dish on the day. Jade — the 6 a.m. streetcar; Jonah — sells him mushrooms; Dario — brother; forages with her; lives out by the state forest

Jade, 31 — nurse on nights at Riverside; carer for her mother. Nina — friend; Kasia — hospital; the 6 a.m. streetcar; Theo — the parking-lot nap idea came from him

Ethan, 24 — the young volunteer at Engine Company 9; apprentice electrician. Tomas — the rig check card; Marcus — school friend

Ivy, 19 — first-year student; a dorm balcony over the rail cut. Marcus — the café; Dev — same building

Beatriz, 58 — cleans 600 Ferry, early shift; lays the second plate on Sundays. Rosa — cousin; Elena — sister-in-law; Maya — 6:30, the sixth floor, they nod; Mikolos — the ten o'clock meeting place

Frank, 70 — retired railwayman; the quiet car out of habit; buys the paper at 6:05. Grace — neighbour; Ray — 6:05; Tomas — sauna; Owen — the quiet car

Denise, 47 — analyst, sixth floor; two teenagers. Maya — colleague; the one who says things out loud; Leo — her son is on Leo's team; Mikolos — her regular stall

Lena, 42 — office manager; single mother of two; the kitchen chair by the door. Denise — school gate; Claire — her employer's HR

Mikolos, 60 — Mikolos, the cheese man — the market's cheese stall, Saturdays only; a farm an hour out. Rosa — beans for cheese; Denise — her regular stall; Beatriz — the ten o'clock meeting place

Ruth, 66 — retired teacher; streetcar regular; a postcard drawer. Grace — library days; Leo — she taught him; Diego — he carried her bags once

Rosa, 68 — community garden, the plot with the beans; feeds everyone. Beatriz — cousin; Elena — beans; Ben — his dog visits the plot fence; Mikolos — beans for cheese

Theo, 35 — warehouse shift lead; naps in the car at lunch. Jade — cousin; Diego — deliveries

 NOTES

Walt, 77 — retired postman; birder; the hide at Heron Flats. Tomas — old friend; Amir — the heron; Ben — the birds on the path

Owen, 45 — software lead; works from home; commutes twice a week on the 7:48. Hana — partner; Frank — quiet car; Sofia — same train some days

Hana, 36 — ceramicist; studio hours by the river. Owen — partner; Priya — Friday coffee

Ben, 50 — accountant; walks the dog because his daughter cannot yet. Lily — daughter; Rosa — the fence; Amir — dawn nod on the path; Walt — the birds Walt points out

Lily, 9 — third grade; the dog is Biscuit. Ben — father

Claire, 55 — HR director; big meetings; walks home forty minutes. Maya — same building, different floor; Nate — ex-colleague; the Tuesday table

Nate, 39 — civil engineer; divorced; Halloran's corner table. Claire — ex-colleague; Ray — buys the paper; Marcus — the band plays Halloran's once a month

Hallida, 38 — Amir's wife; runs the household and a small tailoring order book from home. Amir — husband; Ada — asks her about seams; Elena — brings the difficult jackets

Dario, 49 — Kasia's brother; lives out by the state forest; forages with her; drives a plumbing van. Kasia — sister; Jonah — the mushrooms reach the Kitchen through Kasia

Dev, 22 — graduate student; the library desk by the window; learning Portuguese. Grace — she noticed him; Ivy — same building; different years; Mei — she was his mentor once

Sofia, 27 — junior lawyer; the subway; the drawer. Maya — subway nod; Owen — the 7:48; Claire — HR at a firm across the street

 NOTES

A film or a book for each week

Worth watching with someone, if you like.

Week 1 • Film • My Neighbor Totoro (Hayao Miyazaki, 1988)

Two sisters move to a house in the countryside and spend their days among camphor trees, rice fields and rain, meeting a large creature that lives in the wood.

Long stretches of the film are simply weather, trees and two children looking at them.

Week 2 • Book • Cranford (Elizabeth Gaskell, 1853)

In a small English town the ladies live by rules of elegant economy, rank every new arrival by connection and income, and close around one of their own when her bank fails.

Standing is the local currency, counted openly, and the counting is what the book is made of.

Week 3 • Film • Perfect Days (Wim Wenders, 2023)

A man who cleans public toilets in Tokyo keeps the same day over and over: a cassette in the van, lunch under the same tree, a paperback before sleep.

The pauses in his day stay empty and the camera stays in them.

Week 4 • Book • The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner (Alan Sillitoe, 1959)

A borstal boy trains as the governor's long-distance runner, then, far ahead of the field and in sight of the tape, halts and lets the others pass.

The tape is a few strides away and he stands still, because the ending is the one thing that is his.

Week 5 • Film • Cool Runnings (Jon Turteltaub, 1993)

Four Jamaican sprinters who have never seen snow enter Olympic bobsled, borrow a sled and a disgraced coach, and hold to a schedule in a country with no track.

The team runs on the coach's schedule and a borrowed push-start rig long before any of the four believes in the run.

Week 6 • Book • Heidi (Johanna Spyri, 1880)

A child sent to her grandfather's mountain hut sleeps in hay, drinks goat's milk and walks with the herd, then wastes away in a city house until she is sent back up.

What sets her right in the book is air, food, sleep and the hill, in that order.

NOTES

THE RECEIPTS

Why you can trust this

The research behind these stories

These are the published works the stories name, and the sources of the lines that open them.

[1] Schaffner B., Ulloa R., et al. (2025). An Experimental Study of Netflix Use and the Effects of Autoplay. PACM HCI / CSCW
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[2] Gollwitzer, P. M., Sheeran, P. (2006). Implementation intentions and goal achievement: A meta-analysis of effects and processes. Advances in Experimental Social Psychology
doi:10.1016/S0065-2601(06)38002-1

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Where your practices come from

The Last Four — medieval European towns, a custom with no single record.

The First Mouthful — positive psychology, Bryant and Veroff, 2007.

The Door Not Yet Pushed, Returns First — Japanese railways, a custom with no single record.

The Fifteenth — David Allen's Getting Things Done, Allen, 2001.

One Side, Eleven Trees — Japan, a custom with no single record.

The Lamp on the Sill — South Asian households, a custom with no single record.

The Coin Tray — a book of attention exercises, Walker, 2019.

Twenty Minutes of Rain — Scandinavia, Gelter, 2000.

Two, Then a Third — the back step at night, a custom with no single record.

The Cab at Lunch — smartphone users of the 2010s, a custom with no single record.

The Back Car — the railway, a custom with no single record.

The Blind Half Down — Greece, Naska et al., 2007.

Noon to Noon — the sabbath, a custom with no single record.

The Lead on the Hook — animal shelters and the family dog, a custom with no single record.

Stem Down — the woods of Slavic and Nordic Europe, Łuczaj et al., 2012.

The Crane Lights — optometry, Johnson and Rosenfield, 2023.

The Capped Pen — a novelist's desk, a custom with no single record.

The stories in these pages were written for this report. The moves in them come from the practice library; where a story names a study, the study is listed above, and where it names a tradition, that is all it claims.

Henry Adams — *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907)

Jane Austen — *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)

Rachel Carson — *The Sense of Wonder* (1965 (text 1956))

Kate Chopin — *The Awakening* (1899)

William Congreve — *The Mourning Bride* (1697)

Emily Dickinson — "Forever is composed of Nows" (Fr690 / J624) (written c. 1863; first published 1929)

Ecclesiastes 9:10 (KJV) — *Ecclesiastes, King James Version* (1611) ; King James Version translators (1611)

William Blake — *Auguries of Innocence (Pickering Manuscript)* (c. 1803 (pub. 1863))

Ralph Waldo Emerson — *The Conduct of Life, "Power"* (1860)

William James — *The Principles of Psychology* (1890)

Robert Burns — "To a Louse" (1786)

Samuel Johnson — *James Boswell, The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785 (remark of 16 August 1773))

G. K. Chesterton — *Tremendous Trifles* (1909)

Emily Dickinson — *Poems* (1890), "Exclusion" (written c. 1862; published 1890)

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Emily Dickinson, as recorded by T. W. Higginson — *Remark in conversation, recorded in T. W. Higginson's letter to his wife, 16 August 1870; pub. Letters of Emily Dickinson (1894) and Atlantic Monthly (Oct 1891) (1870)*

Edward Gibbon — *Memoirs of My Life* (1796 (posthumous))

Albert Einstein — *LIFE magazine, "Old Man's Advice to Youth: 'Never Lose a Holy Curiosity'" (William Miller) (1955)*

Ralph Waldo Emerson — *Nature* (1836)

Charles Dickens — *A Christmas Carol* (1843)

Epictetus — *Enchiridion* (c. 125 AD) ; Elizabeth Carter (1758)

Marcus Aurelius — *Meditations* (c. 170 AD) ; George Long (1862)

Samuel Johnson — *James Boswell, The Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791 (remark of 1755))

Marcus Aurelius — *Meditations* (c. 170 AD) ; George Long (1862)

John Milton — *Paradise Lost* (1667)

Thomas Dekker — *The Gull's Hornbook* (1609)

Richard P. Feynman — *"Cargo Cult Science", Caltech commencement address (1974)*

John Milton — *Sonnet XIX, "When I Consider How My Light Is Spent" ("On His Blindness")* (c. 1652; published 1673)

Jane Austen — *Mansfield Park* (1814)

Ecclesiastes — *Bible, King James Version* (1611) ; King James Version translators (1611)

Michel de Montaigne — *Essays* (1580) ; Charles Cotton (1685; Hazlitt ed. 1877)

Benjamin Franklin — *Poor Richard's Almanack (1735); The Way to Wealth (1735 / 1758)*

Michel de Montaigne — *Essays* (1580-88) ; Charles Cotton (1685; Hazlitt ed. 1877)

Seneca — *Moral Letters to Lucilius* (c. 65 AD) ; Richard M. Gummere (Loeb, 1917)

Henry David Thoreau — *Letter to H. G. O. Blake* (1857)

Anthony Trollope — *An Autobiography* (1883)

Vincent van Gogh — *Letter to Theo van Gogh* (1882) ; Van Gogh Letters Project (Van Gogh Museum / Huygens ING, 2009)

These pages were written from your answers. Your name is on them, because they were written for you. Your raw answers are not in them.

HDI.Vision — Thirty coffees for Lucija — ir-9 — 2026-09-24

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