

A MONTH OF SMALL MOVES

Thirty coffees for Lucija

For
Lucija

Document 5 of 5



From the story “The Week of Dresses” in your book.

Starting practices, thirty-six short stories — six a week for five weeks, six for the shelf.

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.

3D · Divert · Discomfort → Delight

HDI rests on one simple idea: 3D. Three words, easy to keep in mind on a hard day.

3D is the umbrella over every model, and it runs through each one. 3D is also a way back to three dimensions: up and down, forward and back, left and right. Smells, sounds, colours and the freedom of open space. The screen is flat; the world your body and senses know best is not.

Divert. When the pull toward the screen comes, willpower alone rarely wins. Turn toward something that does you more good. The things you can turn to are your copers.

Discomfort. The first days of any change feel awkward. That is not a sign it is failing. What carries you through are your energizers: they give you the energy to keep going.

Delight. Repeat the new step, and what took effort becomes familiar, then something you enjoy and choose for yourself.

Each model below is three words: two ways, and where they lead. Remember the letter, and the words come back. Each one is grounded in published research on coping and motivation.

Energizers

Energizers give you the energy to get through the Discomfort.

3M · Meaning · Momentum → Mastery
Meaning — know why it matters to you; Momentum — keep going, and start again kindly after a slip; Mastery — setbacks stop deciding for you

3E · Environment · Energize → Empower
Environment — arrange your space so the good choice is the easy one; Energize — act first; the feeling follows; Empower — the change becomes yours

Copers

Copers are what you can Divert to instead of the screen.

3O · Others · Outdoors → Outstanding
Others — people, face to face; Outdoors — time outside, in nature; Outstanding — feeling fully alive

3A · Awe · Alertness → Achievement
Awe — something bigger than you; Alertness — attention out, here and now; Achievement — doing something that means something to you

3B · Basics · Body → Balance
Basics — sleep, meals and rest without a screen; Body — move in your free time; Balance — a body that can switch off and recover

3S · Separation · Solitude → Success
Separation — distance from the phone; Solitude — time alone, without distraction; Success — you steer your day again

3F · Filter · Focus → Flow
Filter — let in only what matters; Focus — one task at a time; Flow — deep absorption in something worth doing

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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 book. 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.

What this report can and cannot see

This report reads one thing: your relationship with your screens. It reads it from answers you gave on a single occasion.

It cannot see how you are doing otherwise. It does not know your history, what your days are like, or anything you did not type. It is not a diagnosis.

So if something heavier is going on, this is not the place to bring it — and nothing in these pages should be read as telling you that you are fine.

If you would rather talk to a person, start with someone close to you, your doctor, or a helpline where you live. A search will find one in your own country faster than any list we could keep true.

We are not a crisis service, and nobody here reads your answers as you write them.

SIX COFFEES

Week 1

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

WEEK 1 · 1

ENERGIZER 3E · 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 lift from surroundings. 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.

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

not for the evening on a screen whose settings are not yours, and not for the account with no off switch at all. It switches back on in five seconds, so lean it against something with more spine.

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).

WEEK 1 · 2

ENERGIZER 3E · 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.

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 3E · 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.

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).

WEEK 1 · 4

ENERGIZER 3E · 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.

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 3E · 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.

"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.

WEEK 1 · 6

COPER 3F · Filter · Focus › 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.

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

SIX COFFEES

Week 2

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

WEEK 2 · 1

COPER 3F · Filter · Focus › 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 pressure to be available. 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.

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).

WEEK 2 · 2

COPER 3B · Basics · Body › Balance, 3A · Awe · Alertness › Achievement



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 rest & body care. 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.

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

ENERGIZER 3E · Environment · Energize › Empower



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

— CHARLES DICKENS

A Sunday with no Internet

Lucija, here is a story about Hana, whose free day also gets spent inside the phone, on the sofa, next to someone doing the same.

The internet router lives on the shelf by the door of the apartment near Union, under the coats. Its five green lights have not gone dark since the day Hana and Owen moved in. On weekdays Owen works through it from the table. On weekends it works just as hard for nothing. Hana is on the sofa with the pottery glaze suppliers, and then the feed. Owen is at the table with the email he says he is not reading. September has come in clear. The last peaches from the market sit on the windowsill going soft. On Saturday night the two of them sit an arm's length apart for an hour without a word passing, each inside a small lit rectangle.

"We could turn it off," Owen says, to the room. "One day. The whole thing."

"You would last till lunch," Hana says. But she has heard it.

On Sunday morning her hand finds the phone before her feet find the floor. The supplier might have replied, and her thumb is already moving. She puts the phone face down. She picks it up. Then she gets up and pulls the router's plug out of the wall. She drops the plug into the bowl with the peaches. On both phones they turn the mobile data switch off. Calls and texts stay on, so her mother can still call.

The apartment becomes a different room. The phone on the table is a phone: heavy, quiet, a clock with a case. They make the coffee with nothing to look at while the kettle heats up. Owen reaches into his pocket more times than he will admit, and laughs at himself the second time, and not the third. Hana takes down her paper book of pottery glazes and stays on one page longer than she has stayed anywhere since spring. The peach juice runs down her wrist and she lets it.

In the afternoon they walk the river path with the phones in their pockets, like keys. Ben and his dog come the other way at their usual hour, and Ben nods. Late in the day the far bank takes the light while their side is already in shadow, and nobody photographs it. The plug stays in the peach bowl until morning.

Hana pulled the router's plug on a clear September morning and dropped it in the peach bowl, and the apartment near Union became a different room for a day.

A NOTE FROM US —

Pick one day. In the morning, pull the router's plug and switch mobile data off on every phone in the house; leave calls and texts on. Put the plug somewhere you will see it, and put it back the next morning. It needs nothing but a house that agrees.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: choice architecture. The nearest study blocked mobile internet on adults' phones for two weeks, calls and texts still allowed, and found better sustained attention and wellbeing; the moved charger and the single day off the internet are our own lighter forms, and we know of no trial of either. Castelo et al., 2025.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for anyone whose day has to reach other people through the internet: someone on call, a house where somebody needs the connection for work or school that day, or a home where not everyone has agreed to the switch. Calls and texts stay on; where that is not enough, this is not the day for it.

Inspired by: choice architecture, Castelo et al., 2025 — Castelo, N., Kushlev, K., Ward, A. F., Esterman, M., Reiner, P. B., “Blocking mobile internet on smartphones improves sustained attention, mental health, and subjective well-being” (2025); Mertens, S., Herberz, M., Hahnel, U. J. J., Brosch, T., “The effectiveness of nudging: A meta-analysis of choice architecture interventions across behavioral domains” (2022).

WEEK 2 · 4

COPER 3F · Filter · Focus › Flow



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

— RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Three Looks

Lucija, here is a story about Leo, whose work email also follows him home and sits down at the table.

Leo teaches history to fifteen-year-olds and coaches the ones who run. In September the school comes back at him all at once, and most of it is a small red number on the mail icon of his phone. The number is on the phone in class, at the track at four, and at ten at night at the kitchen table. He answers it there anyway. In the next room, Priya is reading in a way that has an opinion in it.

The number is never zero. That is its whole method.

In the second week it is Sam, his son, who says it. Leo is at the stove with the phone in one hand and a spoon in the other. Sam passes through for water and says, "You told us phones off in your room. Is that just for us." Sam is upstairs before it becomes an argument.

Leo stands there. The red number says fourteen. He read six of them at four and did not answer, because he was reading the other eight. He can feel the exact shape of the next hour: the sauce, the phone beside the plate, the thumb, the number never quite reaching zero. The evening will end in the red, and in Priya's opinion.

He turns off the sound. He turns off the red number on the icon. On the back of a permission slip he writes three times to look at the mail — before first bell, lunch, 3:30 — and puts the slip in his planner.

The first week is not comfortable. Between the looks, the mail is somewhere in the building, growing in a room he is not in. He does not go and look. At 3:30 there are twenty-two messages. He answers them in the empty classroom, then walks to the track with nothing red in his pocket.

He does not claim it has changed him. If anyone asked, he would say the evenings are less tense, and leave it there.

On Saturday the three of them go down to the market on Union Square for the last peaches of the summer, which Priya will not miss. Denise is at the cheese stall, loud in the sun, telling the man there that her boy has run the 800-meter race in under two-ten. Sam picks the peaches. Leo carries them. His hands are full, and the phone in his pocket, for once, is only a phone.

Leo stopped answering the mail whenever it glowed and gave it three fixed looks a day — and the evenings stopped ending in the red.

A NOTE FROM US —

Close the mail fully — sound off, badge off. Open it at three fixed times you have written on a note. Between those times it does not exist. 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 an exception for those first. And an anxious checker can get worse, with 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 3B · Basics · Body › Balance



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

— THOMAS DEKKER

The Slow Bit Before the Bridge

Lucija, this one reached you through rest & body care. Here is a story about Jade, whose whole upper half folds down toward the phone before the day has properly begun.

Icy rain in March comes at the Four streetcar sideways. The windows of the first morning car are fogged on the inside and running with water on the outside. So the river, at the slow bit before the bridge, is only a grey suggestion. The bag is on Jade's lap, and the phone is on the bag. The whole top half of her has folded down over it, chin nearly on her collar. Behind her, at home, is a mother who was awake at four. Ahead of her is a shift that starts at seven.

The list is on the phone: pharmacy, physio forms, shoes. She is not reading the list. She is reading what is under it — the feed, which is warm and goes down for ever.

Across the aisle, Kasia from the lab is folded into the same shape over the same kind of thing — the mushroom people, probably. Seeing Kasia is what does it. It is not a thought. Jade sees the shape on someone else, and her neck says, quietly, that it has been carrying her head like a bag of shopping since the Riverside stop.

Her thumb wants one more screen. It gets one. Then the car slows for the bridge. She notices where her weight is: forward, on the bag, on the wrists. She notices where her head is: somewhere over her knees.

She comes up.

Feet flat. Weight back, until the seat has her. Head over the shoulders, chin level, held loosely — not like a soldier, only a woman sitting in a chair. She looks at the fog instead of the phone. The Four rings twice going over the bridge, and she holds the shape for the two rings and a little after.

Nothing else changes. The list is still the list. But the neck has stopped complaining, and the icy rain on the far window has a colour in it now that might be the far bank. She is looking at that when Bernice, the driver, brakes for the hospital stop and says, to the whole car, "Mind the step, sweetheart." Jade minds it. Kasia behind her is still folded over, which is her business. Jade steps down into the icy rain with her head still where she put it.

Jade saw her own folded shape on someone else and came up out of it — and the neck stopped carrying her head like a bag of shopping.

A NOTE FROM US —

Notice the shape you are in — where the weight is, where the head is. Then come up: feet flat, weight back, head over the shoulders, held loosely for a minute. It needs nothing.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: a stress laboratory. In a trial where people were held upright or slumped in their chairs while giving a speech under pressure, the upright sitters reported better mood, higher self-esteem and less fear. Nair et al., 2015.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for chronic back or neck pain, and not for hypermobility — for those bodies the upright shape is not the point. A slump is a shape, not a failing.

Inspired by: a stress laboratory, Nair et al., 2015 — Nair S., Sagar M., Sollers J., Consedine N., Broadbent E., “Do slumped and upright postures affect stress responses? A randomized trial” (2015).

WEEK 2 · 6

COPER 3F · Filter · Focus › Flow



My experience is what I agree to attend to.

— WILLIAM JAMES

The Mail Keeps

Lucija, this one reached you through 3F · Filter · Focus › Flow. 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.

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).

SIX COFFEES

Week 3

This week: six small moves — nothing to buy first. Quiet you choose and quiet that is imposed on you are different things; the stories about stillness here are about the first.

WEEK 3 · 1

COPER 3B · Basics · Body › Balance, 3F · Filter · Focus › Flow



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

— ECCLESIASTES

The Furthest Thing

Lucija, this one reached you through rest & body care. Here is a story about Lena, whose day refuses to be over in her head long after it is over on paper.

The building opposite goes dark floor by floor, like a crossword being finished. Lena is still at her desk, high up at 600 Ferry. Forty-one emails are unread, and the six-forty home is already a fact. February does this. The afternoon ends outside long before it ends in here, and the window turns into a mirror with a spreadsheet in it.

Her eyes complain first, before any opinion does. There is grit at the top of each blink, and the screen goes slightly liquid at the ends of lines. She rubs her eyes with the heels of her hands, which her optician does not approve of, and keeps typing.

Owen stops by her desk on his way out, coat on, the bag strap pulling his collar wrong. Instead of saying goodnight, he looks past her at the glass. "They've topped out the crane across the river," he says. "Furthest thing you can see from this floor. I check on it instead of my inbox, the days I'm in."

When he has gone, she stands at the window.

From up here the city is a circuit board with the power on. The streets run with light, the bridge is strung over the black water, and the lit windows of the Four streetcar cross it, small as a toy. She finds the crane past the river, past the far bank's windows: a red point blinking, with all that dark around it. She lets her eyes go out to the red point and rest there. Her focus loosens. The office behind her falls out of her sight without going anywhere.

She stays there a while, with the red point blinking and the office at her back.

On the roof just opposite, lower than all of that, the weed is still in the gutter — a dry stick of it now, keeping its place through February, waiting out the cold like everyone else.

She goes back and answers three of the forty-one, the three that matter, and closes the laptop lid on the rest.

Down in the street she joins the lit grid, one window of six hundred going dark behind her.

Lena let her eyes go out to the farthest light she could find — and came back to answer three of the forty-one.

A NOTE FROM US —

Between stretches of close work, find the furthest thing you can see and let your eyes rest on it, with the focus gone soft. The exact numbers behind the optometrists' rule have not held up; the far look and the break are the whole of it. It needs nothing.

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. Put an ear on the furthest sound instead.

Inspired by: optometry, Johnson and Rosenfield, 2023.

WEEK 3 · 2

COPER 3A · Awe · Alertness › 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 wonder & beauty. 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.

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).

WEEK 3 · 3

ENERGIZER 3M · Meaning · Momentum › Mastery



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

— JANE AUSTEN

The Bread Run

Lucija, here is a story about Mikolos, who also likes a week with one morning already promised to someone.

February on the farm is turning-and-waiting weather: the cheeses need turning, and little else. A loud man alone with quiet work is glad of the week's other fixed point. Tuesday is the bread run, and has been for years. The farm oven does its slow work overnight. Before it is light, Mikolos is on the road into the city, with the loaves in a crate where a passenger would sit.

The night before, the oven is lit and the phone is bright on the kitchen table, offering the weather and a cousin's argument. He says tomorrow's one thing out loud to the dog: the sisters' stair, then the Kitchen's coffee. Then the phone goes on the dresser and he goes up to bed.

The first loaves already have owners. The old sisters live up the stair beside the Northside bakery. They have been tenants there since before the bakery below was any good. They buy nothing from him at the market and get bread from him anyway, because their mother once fed his father, and that account has no bottom. He climbs their stair in the dark with the crate under one arm and meets the famous smell coming the other way. The bakery starts so early that the smell reaches the landing while the street is still asleep. His own loaves pass through it like fish through a current.

The sisters take the bread at the door in their dressing gowns. They argue with him about payment, lose as they always do, and send him off with dried plums.

Then the Kitchen, the bistro. The back door on the alley is propped open even in February. The morning cook takes the rest of the crate at the pass; the bistro has decided farm bread belongs beside its soup, which suits everyone. The delivery note gets signed against the doorframe with cold hands, and there is coffee in a kitchen glass while the ovens breathe.

Driving out, he passes the market square, half-empty and off duty. He feels the small, steadying weight of the thing: whatever the week does now, Tuesday is already spent well. Getting up this morning was never in question. The loaves saw to that. They were promised. A promised loaf, he has found, is a better alarm than any rooster on the farm, because bread does not have a snooze.

Mikolos drove in before light with the promised loaves in the crate where a passenger would sit, and getting up was never in question, and passing the half-empty market he felt the ballast of a Tuesday already spent well.

A NOTE FROM US —

Give tomorrow one small thing it is holding for you, and name it tonight. It needs nothing.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: everyday Japan. People there speak of ikigai, what a day holds that makes it worth living, and Mieko Kamiya's book describes it as lived daily meaning rather than a grand purpose. Kamiya, 1966.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for a low stretch when nothing comes to mind — there it turns into evidence against you. Coffee is an allowed answer.

Inspired by: everyday Japan, Kamiya, 1966.

WEEK 3 · 4

COPER 3B · Basics · Body › Balance, 3S · Separation · Solitude › Success



The soul selects her own society,
Then shuts the door

— EMILY DICKINSON

The Edge of the Plate

Lucija, here is a story about Dev, whose dinner plate also takes forty minutes, eaten at the speed of whatever is playing beside it.

The heat in July gets into the room by mid-afternoon and stays past midnight. When Dev finally sits down to his plate, it is already sweating on the table, with the fork standing in it like a flag. He has come home from the library reading room through the big hall at Union station. He walked under the clock that runs two minutes fast, which he has begun to believe without deciding to. Ivy from downstairs was on the stairs with a paper fan. She said hi, and he said hi. That was all the talking he did today.

The laptop is open at the far end of the table, paused on last night's episode. The man on the screen has his mouth open in the middle of a word he has been in the middle of for twenty-two hours. That is how eating alone goes now: the fork stops moving whenever the picture does. The plate takes forty minutes, and he could not say afterwards what was on it.

His hand goes to the trackpad on its own, the way a hand finds the rail of a stair in the dark.

He closes the laptop lid. He turns the phone face down beside the salt.

Then he eats. Nothing else in the room moves except the fan and the fork. He eats the rice, the eggs, the greens with too much oil, at the speed of eating, which turns out to be faster than the picture and slower than the phone. The plate is empty in eleven minutes. When it is empty he gets up, because that is where his rule ends. The rule is simple: while he eats, he only eats. It ends at the edge of the plate.

He does not go back to the pan. Other nights he does, later, standing. Tonight the second helping stays on the stove. He notices that once, as a plain fact about a plate, and leaves it there.

He washes up. Down the hall Ivy's fan is going. The episode is where he left it, and it will still be there. He watches it on the bed, with nothing in his hands but the heat, and the man on the screen finishes his word.

Dev closed the lid and ate at the speed of eating — and the plate was empty in eleven minutes, and he got up at the edge of it.

A NOTE FROM US —

Close the laptop and turn the phone over. Eat at the speed of eating until the plate is empty, and then get up — the meal is over, and the rule with it. 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 with a history of troubled eating — take the transit or waiting version instead. It 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 3A · Awe · Alertness › Achievement



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

— G. K. CHESTERTON

The Coin Tray

Lucija, this one reached you through wonder & beauty. 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."

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.

WEEK 3 · 6

COPER 3A · Awe · Alertness › Achievement, 3S · Separation · Solitude › Success



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

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

The Lamp on the Sill

Lucija, this one reached you through wonder & beauty. 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."

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.

SIX COFFEES

Week 4

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

WEEK 4 · 1

ENERGIZER 3E · Environment · Energize › Empower



Other men are lenses through which we read our own minds.

— RALPH WALDO EMERSON

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.

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).

WEEK 4 · 2

COPER 3B · Basics · Body › Balance



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

— BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

Standing Room

Lucija, here is a story about Claire, whose best hour of the morning also disappears into a meeting where everyone sits down.

Claire's body knows the morning meeting before her calendar does: a settling in the lower back, a kind of patience in advance, the shoulders arranging themselves for the long haul. It is the meeting that runs longest at 600 Ferry. Chairs are pulled out, coats draped, coffees set down, and twelve people lower themselves into the posture of people who will be here a while. September light comes in clean over the roof opposite, where the weed in the gutter is getting on with its year. By the time anyone stands up, the light has moved off the table.

The day it runs over by a full hour, Claire walks back to her desk with the verdict going round in her head the whole way: should have cut the pensions item, should have named an end and held it. The verdict is an old companion and has never once been useful.

She does not send a memo. Memos about shorter meetings become agenda items in longer ones.

Instead, the next time, the room itself is different, because she has come in early and made it different. The chairs are stacked against the wall, and the table stands in the middle like a raft. One chair stays by the window. No comment is attached to it. People arrive, look for somewhere to put themselves, and find only their own feet. Somebody laughs. Maya from the sixth floor takes the corner of the table and says less than she usually says. Claire notices this, files it away, and does not enjoy it.

Standing, the meeting has a different pace. Items are decided or put aside; nobody unpacks. The pensions item takes four minutes because everyone's knees have a vote. They finish inside the half hour. As far as Claire can tell, the decisions are the same decisions the chairs would have reached. There are simply forty spare minutes standing where the meeting used to be.

She banks hers, and on Saturday spends them at the market, at the stall with the last peaches, carrying the bag home through the crowd like something rescued.

Claire came in early and stacked the chairs against the wall, and the pensions item took four minutes because everyone's knees had a vote, and she banked her forty spare minutes for the market.

A NOTE FROM US —

Take the chairs out before the meeting gathers. It needs only the room, and one chair left by the wall, no comment, for whoever needs it.

ONE SITTING · COMES BACK · ONE OTHER PERSON

Where this comes from: a management laboratory. In an experiment where five-member groups worked a decision task standing or seated, the seated meetings ran about a third longer and reached no better decisions, though satisfaction and use of information differed. Bluedorn, Turban and Love, 1999.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for a room where anyone's body cannot stand through it — a real bar, not a footnote.

Inspired by: a management laboratory, Bluedorn, Turban and Love, 1999 — Bluedorn A. C., Turban D. B., Love M. S., “The effects of stand-up and sit-down meeting formats on meeting outcomes” (1999); Mansfield L., Hall J., Smith L., Rasch M., Reeves E., Dewitt S., Gardner B., “"Could you sit down please?" A qualitative analysis of employees' experiences of standing in normally-seated workplace meetings” (2018).

WEEK 4 · 3

COPER 3F · Filter · Focus › Flow



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

— SAMUEL JOHNSON

By Appointment

Lucija, here is a story about Jonah, whose email inbox also keeps running through every gap in the day.

The walk-in fridge at Ferry Street Kitchen is the coldest room Jonah owns, and the one where he spends his worst minutes. Between the prep list and the first order ticket there are gaps. In the gaps he stands among the crates with the door pulled shut, thumbing through the phone: a supplier's price list, a booking that shrank overnight, a question about an invoice, another invoice. He comes out with cold hands and a colder thread of it still running in his head. Some nights the tidy-down gets skipped, because the last mail of the evening has opened four more.

In March he carries lunch boxes across to the office building at 600 Ferry, with wind off the river the whole way. Under the green awning, the newsstand man is telling a regular customer that the weed in the roof gutter across the street has shown green again — same crack, third year running. Upstairs, Claire signs for the boxes with one eye on the wall clock. "I answer mail at eleven and at four," she says, when she sees him look. "At half past, the meeting walks in and mail is over. The meeting doesn't care what I've got open."

Riding down in the lift, he can see the river between the buildings, brown and busy in March. He understands that the walk-in has no clock in it, and never will have: nothing in there tells him when to stop.

He draws two lines in the kitchen diary. Mail after the market van, until the fish arrives. Mail after dinner service, until the knock comes on the alley door for the staff coffee.

In the first week his hand still finds the phone in the cold, out of old habit. He puts it back in the dry-store drawer and finishes counting crates instead. The fish arrives when the fish arrives. The knock comes when it comes. The inbox closes on their clock, not his. Inside these slots he jumps between tasks less than he ever did in the gaps, and he does not say so out loud in his own kitchen. The tidy-down comes back. The walk-in returns to being a cold room full of food, which is all it was ever built to be.

Jonah ruled two lines in the kitchen diary and let the fish and the knock close the inbox, and the tidy-down came back, and the walk-in returned to being a cold room full of food.

A NOTE FROM US —

Put email inside fixed calendar appointments; the next event, not willpower, ends the session. It needs nothing.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: one American workplace. Thirteen office workers went five days without email while wearing heart-rate monitors; their heart rate settled into a more natural rhythm, they switched windows less and held focus longer; email kept to calendar slots was not tested. Mark, Voida and Cardello, 2012.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for roles where answers are genuinely expected within the hour — set expectations first, or the boundary breaks trust.

Inspired by: one American workplace, Mark, Voida and Cardello, 2012 — Mark, G., Voida, S., Cardello, A., “"A pace not dictated by electrons": An empirical study of work without email” (2012).

WEEK 4 · 4

ENERGIZER 3E · 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.

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

COPER 3B · Basics · Body › Balance



If you add only a little to a little and do this often, soon that little will become great.

— HESIOD

The Blind Half Down

Lucija, this one reached you through rest & body care. 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.

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.

WEEK 4 · 6

ENERGIZER 3E · 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.

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).

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 3B · Basics · Body › Balance



You should pray for a sound mind in a sound body.

— JUVENAL

The Week of Dresses

Lucija, this one reached you through rest & body care. 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.

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).

WEEK 5 · 2

COPER 3A · Awe · Alertness › Achievement, 3B · Basics · Body › Balance



The important thing is not to stop questioning.

— ALBERT EINSTEIN

Twenty Minutes of Rain

Lucija, this one reached you through wonder & beauty. 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.

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 5 · 3

ENERGIZER 3M · Meaning · Momentum › Mastery



I am not concerned that I have no place, I am concerned how I may fit myself for one.

— CONFUCIUS

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.

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 · 4

COPER 3B · Basics · Body › Balance, 3O · Others · Outdoors › Outstanding



A wish for friendship may arise quickly, but friendship does not.

— ARISTOTLE

The Quarter Hour

Lucija, here is a story about Denise, whose group chat also goes off in her pocket and is never quite finished with her.

The office kitchen on the sixth floor of 600 Ferry belongs to nobody, which is how it got this way. There is a microwave with a ring of old soup inside the door. There is a printer corner where the misprints go to lie down and stay. Denise has worked up here for nine years. She has said someone should do something about that kitchen more times than she has washed a mug that was not hers.

Then, one September morning, she comes in early and finds Beatriz at the counter with a scraper, scraping somebody's exploded soup off the inside roof of the microwave, singing quietly while she works. Beatriz cleans this building for a living. The building is her job. The soup is the sixth floor's own mess.

Denise is loud when she is sure of a thing. By the end of the week there is a new quarter-hour, the last thing before the office closes for the week. A timer is set on the printer. Every desk is empty, and everyone has a surface to clean: mugs, the fridge shelf, the corner where the misprints lie. The rule she fights hardest for is the one about Beatriz. This is not a help-Beatriz hour. Beatriz takes her break during it, sitting down, with coffee. It is everyone else's turn.

The first time, two minutes in, the phone goes off in her pocket. It is the family chat, three grandaunt photographs deep by now, and her thumb already knows the shape of the reply. Her hands are in the sink. They keep going. The wiping has a rhythm to it. The rhythm reaches her shoulders before any decision does, and the phone stays where it is.

The timer ends it with the fridge half done. Half done is what the rule says: when the timer ends, you stop. She leaves the shelf she was on and dries her hands.

Maya is at the window with a towel and a mug, looking across at the roof opposite. "Weed's still up there," she says. "It'll flower in October, watch." The kitchen smells of nothing at all, which on the sixth floor is a smell with a name.

Denise kept her hands in the sink when the family chat went off three grandaunt photographs deep, and the timer ended the quarter-hour with the fridge half done, which is what the rule says.

A NOTE FROM US —

Put a quarter-hour on the clock, once a week, for everyone to clean the shared space together — timer on, timer ends it, finished or not. It needs only the timer and the agreement.

ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: Japanese schools. In souji, pupils stop at a fixed time each day and spend a quarter-hour cleaning the classrooms and corridors they all use, and the bell ends it whether or not it is finished. (custom; no single record)

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for whoever already does the cleaning, at work or at home — it is everyone else's turn. And let the timer end it even mid-job, or it grows. The school version this borrows from is daily and required of every pupil; weekly and voluntary is our change, not theirs.

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

WEEK 5 · 5

COPER 3A · Awe · Alertness › Achievement



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

— EPICTETUS

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.

Ben took the earbud out under the empty hook and gave the walk a different job, and he was smaller by the time he reached Northside.

A NOTE FROM US —

Give a fifteen-minute walk that would happen anyway a different job: look for what is vast or not understood — a crane, the weather, an old wall — and stop when something catches. It needs the walk you already take.

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

Where this comes from: weekly walks by older adults. In a trial of 60 people over eight fifteen-minute walks, those told to look for what is vast reported more joy and less daily distress than ordinary walkers; worry and low mood unchanged. Sturm et al., 2022.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for legs that do not carry fifteen minutes, and not after dark. Not the storm-and-cliff kind of vast.

Inspired by: weekly walks by older adults, Sturm et al., 2022 — Sturm V.E., Datta S., Roy A.R.K., Sible I.J., Kosik E.L., Veziris C.R., Chow T.E., Morris N.A., Neuhaus J., Kramer J.H., Miller B.L., Holley S.R., Keltner D., “Big smile, small self: Awe walks promote prosocial positive emotions in older adults” (2022).

WEEK 5 · 6

COPER 3B · Basics · Body › Balance, 3O · Others · Outdoors › Outstanding



The drop of rain maketh a hole in the stone, not by violence, but by oft falling.

— HUGH LATIMER

Bath Night

Lucija, here is a story about Dario, whose working days also pass in a warm box with a lit screen for company.

There is salt on the sidewalks and ice at the river's edge, and Dario's van knows the way across town before he does. He is a plumber, and today's callout is at the Finnish Hall: a shower valve leaking behind sixty-year-old tile. He works alone most days. The radio talks, the phone lights up in the cup holder at every red light, and he moves through the cold town in a warm box, speaking to nobody until supper.

Tomas holds the light for him while he solders the joint. Tomas is lighting the stove for bath night, and steam is already drifting under the door like a ghost. When the valve holds, Tomas watches the wrench go back into its tool roll and says, "Stay for the bath. You've earned the heat you'd be billing me for."

"I don't—" Dario starts, and stops there, which for Dario is half a speech.

"Nobody does. Come anyway," Tomas says.

In the changing room his clothes go into a locker, and the phone goes with them. His hand makes one small empty pass at his hip where the pocket was. Then there is nothing to carry and nothing to answer, and he goes in barehanded like everyone else.

The bench holds the same men it holds every week. They wash slowly, at a speed no job would pay for, and talk about ice on the river, somebody's chimney, nothing at all. Nobody asks what he drives or what he charges. That is not the same as the room making anyone equal; it is only that there are no pockets in it. Tomas puts him on the low bench without comment, where the heat is a coat and not a wall. Dario's shoulders come down from around his ears before he has decided anything about them.

He stays for the second round.

Afterwards they stand on the porch in towels, four men steaming in the dark. The snow comes down into their steam and vanishes a foot above their heads. From across the roofs, faint on the river wind, one of the six bells of St. Anne's tells the hour to whoever is out in it.

"Same time next week," Dario says, to the snow, before anyone can ask him.

Dario put the phone in the locker with his clothes and went in barehanded, and on the porch afterwards, steaming in the dark, he said same time next week before anyone could ask him.

A NOTE FROM US —

Go to a shared bath at the same hour each week, with the same people, and wash slowly enough to talk; the clothes and the phone stay in the locker. It needs money.

ONE SITTING · COMES BACK · ONE OTHER PERSON · COSTS A LITTLE · NEEDS A BLOCK OF TIME

Where this comes from: the public bathhouse, the hammam, banya and jjimjilbang. People go at a set time in the same company, wash very slowly over a couple of hours, and talk; the clothes stay in the locker. (custom; no single record)

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not a room that is not safe first. These places are not open to everyone: the bath traditions named here separate by sex as a rule, and many venues shut out trans people. It costs money and privacy, the heat is real, and nobody owes the room their skin.

Inspired by: the public bathhouse, the hammam, banya and jjimjilbang, a custom with no single record.

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

ENERGIZER 3M · Meaning · Momentum › Mastery



The growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts.

— GEORGE ELIOT

The Jar on the Shelf

Lucija, here is a story about Kasia, who also finds that her energy comes back only when something is owed to someone.

Kasia keeps dates the way other people keep keys. The second of November is her mother's day, the day she keeps for her mother, and it is tomorrow. On the shelf above the stove is the jar. In it are the mushrooms she dried in October, from the state forest and the walk with her brother in the rain. Her mother's dish needs those mushrooms. The jar has been on the shelf for three weeks, waiting, and getting looked at.

The lab shift ends at four. By five she is on the sofa with the phone, and the phone is the group chat. The chat is where the mushrooms live now: who found what, and where; the photographs of baskets; the argument about the one that is either edible or a story. She has posted her basket. She has scrolled through everyone else's. Rain is on the window, and it has been dark since twenty to five. The chat is still going, and it is warm there in a way the kitchen is not.

Nobody is coming tomorrow. Her brother is out by the forest with his own family. In the old arrangement the dish was for a table, and the table is one plate now. The phone is a good place not to think about that.

The jar is watching her from the shelf. That is a ridiculous sentence, and she thinks it anyway.

She gets up. She gets the flour down.

She does it the way it was done. The dough goes on the table. The mushrooms get soaked and chopped fine, then the onion. Each little dumpling gets folded shut with a thumb, the whole clumsy hour of it. She sets two plates, because that is how it was set, and says the date out loud once, to the kitchen, in Polish. She eats from one plate and puts the second under a cloth. The chat goes on without her.

On the six o'clock streetcar, Jade from the hospital gets the second plate in a box on her lap, still cold from the windowsill. "What's this for."

"It's the second," Kasia says, as if that were a date anyone would know. Jade eats one before her stop. At home, the jar on the shelf is lighter by half, and it has next year in it.

Kasia cooked her mother's dish on her mother's day and set two plates — and the jar on the shelf got lighter, with next year in it.

A NOTE FROM US —

On their day, cook the dish of someone gone, the way it was made, for whoever is eating. Say the date out loud once. It needs the shopping and an evening.

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

Where this comes from: indigenous communities of Mexico. Each year at the end of October and start of November, families prepare the favourite dishes of their dead and set them at the home shrine and the tomb. UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2008.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for a day when the smell would be too much. The grief a dish can bring on is real, and it is worth knowing that before the pan is on.

Inspired by: indigenous communities of Mexico, UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2008.

THE SHELF · 2

ENERGIZER 3M · Meaning · Momentum › Mastery



For this is your business—to act well the given part, but to choose it belongs to another.

— EPICTETUS

The Red Glass

Lucija, here is a story about Grace, whose nights also end with the news read three times on a tablet.

The bakery under Grace's building starts before it is light. The smell comes up through the floorboards while the street is still dark, and once a month it is her alarm. First Saturdays. On the shelf by the door the red candle glass stands empty, as it has since the last one. It has rained all week. This morning, for once, the sky over Northside has been rinsed and hung out, and the light on the wet roofs is the hard November kind. Six years, this month.

The tablet is on the arm of the chair, where it spent the night. She read the news at ten, and at eleven, and at ten to one. Now it wants picking up again, and she picks it up. The same news is there a fourth time, and she reads it, standing, in her coat.

Across the landing Frank's door is open for the bin. He looks at her coat and says, "You were late up last month," and takes the bin down. Frank does not usually manage that many words.

She takes the cloth from the drawer, a candle from the box of six, and the red glass, and goes.

She takes the subway to the last stop and walks up through Hillcrest, with the wet leaves flattened on the pavement, to the row and his gravestone, third from the maple. Grace wipes the stone. She pulls the grass at the edge. She sets the new candle in the red glass and lights it, and the flame stands up straight, there being for once no wind. Then she stands a minute with her hands in her pockets and says nothing to him, because she never did in life either.

Below her the whole city is laid out in the hard light: the river, the bridge, the roofs of Northside. Among them is the tower of St. Anne's, with its slatted windows and the six bells inside it, silent till Wednesday.

She walks back the long way, and does not take the tablet out on the train.

On Wednesday, at knitting, Ada asks whether she went up.

"First Saturday," Grace says, and that settles it.

The red glass is on the shelf again, empty for a month, and the box of candles is down to five.

Grace took the cloth and the red glass up to the stone third from the maple, and the flame stood up straight, there being for once no wind.

A NOTE FROM US —

Take the cloth and a new candle on the same day each month. Wipe the stone, pull the grass at the edge, set the candle and light it, stand a minute, and walk back the long way. It needs candle money, an hour, and a fare.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK · OUTDOORS

Where this comes from: family graves in Japan and Slovakia. Women in Japan keep up the family grave as a standing household duty, and in Slovakia families go to the graves on All Saints' and All Souls' each year. Nakamatsu, 2009; Uhrin, 2026.

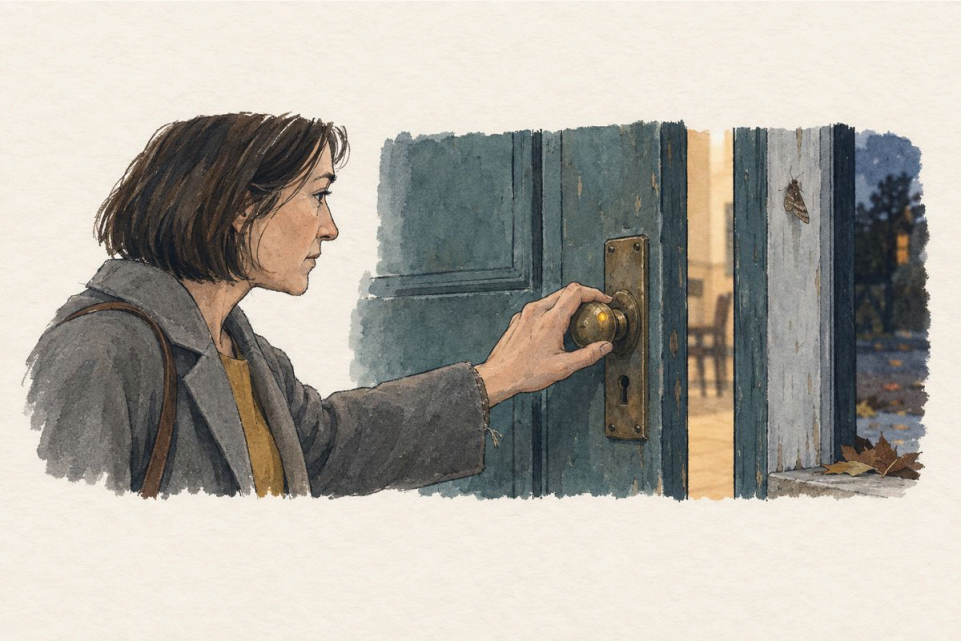
NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for the first year of a loss — this is settled remembrance, not fresh grief. If the visits turn compulsive or dreaded, stop.

Inspired by: family graves in Japan and Slovakia, Nakamatsu, 2009; Uhrin, 2026.

THE SHELF · 3

ENERGIZER 3M · Meaning · Momentum › Mastery



But what is your duty? The claims of the day.

— JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

Altos Wanted

Lucija, here is a story about Elena, whose one phone also rings for the shop and the family and never for her.

In October Elena locks the cleaners for the night and walks home the long way, past St. Anne's, for the sound of the leaves. The phone in her coat is the shop's phone and the family's phone, one phone: a woman about a wedding dress, Tomas about the sauna, a jacket that will not come clean. It rings for everyone. It has not rung for her in years.

The window of the parish hall is open as she walks past. Inside, a choir is running through a piece. There is a hole in the middle of the chord, a line of low voices that ought to be there and is not. The conductor stops them, and they go again, and the hole is still there. On the hall door is a sheet: ALTOS WANTED. TUESDAYS 7:30.

The phone lights up in her hand. A woman about a coat. Elena answers it, walking, and behind her the choir goes again, and stops again.

She has not sung since school. All week the sheet stays where it was and the phone stays where it is. By the next Tuesday she has told herself twice that she is not the sort: the shop, Tomas, the loud voice that carries across a counter. At twenty past seven she is outside the hall door with the phone in her hand, reading a message about a hem.

She goes in.

Grace is coming down from the tower stair with a coil of bell rope over her arm, dry as a hymn sheet. "Altos are the far side. Don't let him put you with the sopranos, they're loud enough." Elena takes the low line, with no solo. The second time through, the hole in the chord is a hole no longer, and the conductor nods and goes on. Above them the six bells hang tied off and silent, as they do on a Tuesday.

It is one evening, and only the low line, and she liked it more than anything since the summer. That is her own report, worth what such reports are worth. On the steps she reads the two messages that came while she sang.

Tomas, at the table with the news, looks up. "You're late."

"I'm an alto," Elena says.

Elena went in at twenty past and took the low line with no solo, and the second time through the hole in the chord was a hole no longer.

A NOTE FROM US —

Join one choir or band and hold one part — the low alto, the bass line — every week. No solo, and no committee. It needs an evening a week, and a voice that holds a note.

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

Where this comes from: English choirs. Over six hundred choral singers filled in a wellbeing questionnaire and scored high on all its scales, and most agreed that singing does them good; a survey of people already singing, with no comparison group. Clift and colleagues, 2010.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for anyone walled out by an audition, or whose voice or hearing cannot hold a line. Concerts add obligations; sit in first if unsure.

Inspired by: English choirs, Clift and colleagues, 2010 — Clift S., Hancox G., Morrison I., Hess B., Kreutz G., Stewart D., “Choral singing and psychological wellbeing: Quantitative and qualitative findings from English choirs in a cross-national survey” (2010).

THE SHELF · 4

ENERGIZER 3E · Environment · Energize › Empower



Dear old world, you are very lovely, and I am glad to be alive in you.

— L. M. MONTGOMERY, ANNE OF GREEN GABLES

Colour on Request

Lucija, here is a story about Owen, who also likes colour better when he has to ask for it.

Owen's phone screen has been grey since spring; he set it to show no colour. It is not a statement and he does not bring it up, except when somebody hands the thing back to him with a worried face. Grey is simply where the phone lives now. He switches colour on only when there is a reason, the way a person puts a lamp on to find one jar in a cupboard.

July arrived all at once, as it does, and the office building on Ferry Street is running its air conditioning with a noisy grudge. He commutes twice a week on the seven forty-eight train and takes the last car, the quiet one. In this heat it is a carriage of paper fans and no conversation. In the lobby, Owen waits with a colleague for a lift that is stuck up on the sixth floor. The colleague borrows his phone to check the trains, and gets halfway down the timetable before looking up.

"Something is wrong with your screen."

"That is the setting," Owen says. He reaches over and turns the colour on for him, and the timetable goes green and red and useful again. He puts it back to grey when the phone comes back to him.

That is the whole arrangement. Colour for the timetable, and colour for the pictures his mother sends of her garden, which have earned it. Grey for the rest. The odd part, which he would not bring up at a dinner table, is what grey does to the feed. It forbids nothing. It simply stops the stuff arriving like weather. He puts the phone down more often, the way a person puts down a book that has quietly stopped being about anything.

The next morning he is at his window with a coffee, in early, before the others. He looks across at the identical building opposite and notices that the weed in its roof gutter has flowered.

It is small and yellow and entirely uninterested in either building, and it is, he decides, a colour that requires no setting whatsoever.

Owen kept the phone grey and turned colour on for a colleague's timetable and his mother's garden, and the feed stopped arriving like weather, and the flowered weed in the gutter opposite required no setting whatsoever.

A NOTE FROM US —

Set the phone grey by default and switch colour on when there is a reason — the timetable, the photographs that have earned it — then back. 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 a screen by its colours — coded reds and greens go grey too, 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).

THE SHELF · 5

ENERGIZER 3E · Environment · Energize › Empower



In every walk with Nature one receives far more than he seeks.

— JOHN MUIR

The Drawer

Lucija, here is a story about Sofia, whose desk also hums twice a minute with things that are not the work.

Sofia's desk faces the window, and the window faces 600 Ferry. On the ground floor of 600 Ferry is the green awning of the newsstand. In January people stand under it, out of the snow, with their collars up, waiting for the traffic light. She watches them more than she should. She is the newest name on the door. The list on her pad has fourteen lines, and the phone lies face-down beside the keyboard, as if face-down settled anything.

It buzzes once against the wood. The wood carries it into her wrist. She turns it over — a partner, no; a shop, yes, forty off — and turns it back. She finds the sentence she was in the way you find a stair in the dark: with the shin.

Earlier, on the subway, the woman from the sixth floor across the street had nodded at her, the way they do. Sofia had nodded back with the phone in her hand, missed her stop by one, and walked back through the salt.

The empty white calendar for February is open in the other window on her screen. She is afraid of it in a way she would not say out loud in this building.

The phone buzzes again. Her hand is already there. The thing about the hand is that it does not ask her; it goes to the wood the way it would go to a light switch. Under the desk is a drawer with paperclips in it, and a charger for a phone she no longer owns.

She opens the drawer and puts the phone in it, screen up, sound on, and closes the drawer.

The wood is quiet. The next buzz is a small far thing inside a drawer. To fetch it she would have to stand up, and she does not. The sentence about the lease goes on to its end, and the one after it. Across the street the snow turns grey, and the people under the awning change, and change again. At four the drawer buzzes, and she stands up for it, once, on purpose — it is her mother. She takes the call at the window, looking down at the green awning, then sits back down and closes the drawer.

Sofia put the buzzing phone in the drawer and closed it — and the sentence about the lease ran on to its end, and the one after it.

A NOTE FROM US —

Put the phone in a closed drawer, with the sound on if a call must reach you. Face-down on the desk does not count. It needs ten seconds.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: a psychology lab. In experiments where people left their phone in another room rather than on the desk, they did better on tests of holding material in mind, more so the more they depended on the phone; later reviews contest the size of the effect. Ward et al., 2017.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for carers, on-call staff, or anyone with a vulnerable dependant. There the phone stays within reach, sound on, unshamed.

Inspired by: a psychology lab, Ward et al., 2017 — Ward, A. F., Duke, K., Gneezy, A., Bos, M. W., “Brain Drain: The Mere Presence of One's Own Smartphone Reduces Available Cognitive Capacity” (2017); Ruiz Pardo A.C., Minda J.P., “Reexamining the 'brain drain' effect: A replication of Ward et al. (2017)” (2022).

THE SHELF · 6

ENERGIZER 3E · Environment · Energize › Empower



If I have seen further it is by standing on ye sholders of Giants.

— ISAAC NEWTON

One Word a Day

Lucija, here is a story about Frank, whose phone also came into the house as a favour, and who knows a chain when he sees one.

Frank's son set the phone up at Christmas, at the kitchen table, with the patience of a man explaining a railway crossing to a horse. It has lit up twice since, and both times Frank looked at it the way he looks at weather. It lives in the inside pocket of his coat, with the reading glasses, and comes out for nothing.

Then in February the son, visiting, put a game on it. "One a day, Dad. A word. Everybody gets the same one, and when you've done it, that's it till tomorrow. Like the crossword." Frank did not say that he has the crossword. He said, "Right," and put the phone back in the coat.

It thaws and freezes. Under the green awning at five past six, the pavement is a sheet of ice. Ray is stacking the bundles of papers with his gloves off. The paper is warm from the bundle, in a way Frank likes and would not mention. He stands under the awning with it.

He takes the phone out — a thing he has not done standing up before — finds the game where the boy left it, and does the word. It takes him four tries. The letters go green. The screen says the next one is tomorrow. There is a small counter of days, and he does not look at it, on purpose, because he knows a chain when he sees one: a row of days that asks not to be broken.

He puts the phone back in the coat.

That is all, and it is the whole of it: there was a thing that ended, and he let it end. He reads the paper under the awning while the light comes back — a minute more of it than yesterday, says Ray, who counts these things. At 7:48 he is in the last car of the train out of Union, with the paper folded to the crossword. The phone is in the coat, dark, done for the day, like a stove banked for the night.

Next morning the ice has gone to water, and will be ice again by dark. Ray hands him the paper. "You had your word yet?"

"Not till I've had my paper," Frank says.

Frank did the word under the awning and let the game lock until tomorrow — and the phone went back in the coat, dark, done for the day.

A NOTE FROM US —

Delete the game that has no last level. Keep one puzzle that comes once a day and locks until tomorrow — the lock is the ending. It needs nothing.

NOTHING TO BUY · ONE SITTING · COMES BACK

Where this comes from: newspaper puzzles and Wordle. Josh Wardle built Wordle in 2021 to give one puzzle a day and lock until tomorrow, a rule he took on purpose from the New York Times Spelling Bee. (custom; no single record)

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Not for streak-anxious people, in whom the counter of days becomes its own chain, the very thing to avoid. Not for anyone who would simply add five more daily games.

Inspired by: newspaper puzzles and Wordle, a custom with no single record.

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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; Sam — school

Leo, 41 — high-school history teacher, coaches track. Priya — wife; Sam — son; 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; Sam — son; Hana — friend from the studio building; coffee on Fridays

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

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

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

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

Sam, 15 — tenth grade. Leo — father; Priya — mother; Tyler — same school, different world

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A film or a book for each week

Worth watching with someone, if you like.

Week 1 · Film · Chef (Jon Favreau, 2014)

A chef who has lost his restaurant kitchen buys an old food truck, cooks with his hands across the country with his son beside him, and keeps the hours the work demands.

The cooking is filmed as physical work - heat, knife, dough - not as a career move.

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 · 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 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 · The Old Man and the Sea (Ernest Hemingway, 1952)

An old fisherman waits alone on flat water for days, holds the line across his back when the fish takes it, and rows home with the skeleton lashed to his boat.

Most of the book is one man, one line and a great deal of waiting.

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.

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Grounds: Stand up once (t2)
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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 Furthest Thing — optometry, Johnson and Rosenfield, 2023.

The Bread Run — everyday Japan, Kamiya, 1966.

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

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

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

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

Twenty Minutes of Rain — Scandinavia, Gelter, 2000.

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

The Quarter Hour — Japanese schools, a custom with no single record.

Bath Night — the public bathhouse, the hammam, banya and jjimjilbang, a custom with no single record.

The Jar on the Shelf — indigenous communities of Mexico, UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2008.

The Red Glass — family graves in Japan and Slovakia, Nakamatsu, 2009; Uhrin, 2026.

One Word a Day — newspaper puzzles and Wordle, a custom with no single record.

The stories in these pages were written for this book. 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.

The pictures in this book were made with AI image generation (OpenAI) to go with the stories. The people in them are not real.

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))
Charles Dickens — *A Christmas Carol* (1843)
Ralph Waldo Emerson — *The Conduct of Life, "Power"* (1860)

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