

THE SUMMER OF THE CARENTER BEE

2025 V Le Chenz

A summer in southern New Hampshire? Man, it's an absolute gem! Nestled amidst the stunning landscapes are the White Mountains and Gregg Lake, two breathtaking spots that are worth every moment spent exploring. It's like this hidden paradise that we kind of wish everyone knew about, yet somehow it continues to stay under the radar, preserved in its tranquil beauty. Most days, life here is blissfully chill, with the gentle sounds of nature and the warmth of the sun creating a perfect backdrop.

But when is it not? Oh boy, that's when the scene shifts dramatically. It's like a parade of town trucks rumbling down the roads, and those wannabe racers with their modified engines revving them up, trying to draw attention, as if they were the main event at the circus. The roar of their engines pierces the serene atmosphere, competing for the spotlight in a place where peace usually reigns. It's a curious blend of excitement and annoyance, life at its most vibrant and chaotic, all wrapped up in the charm of small-town summer living.

Antrim is a hidden gem nestled within enchanting forests that seem to have leaped straight from the pages of a fairy tale. Towering trees, their leaves whispering secrets in the gentle breeze, create a lush canopy overhead, while vibrant wildflowers burst forth in a riot of colors beneath. The serene, reflective lakes, like polished mirrors, make you question whether you've truly awakened from a dream, inviting you to linger and lose yourself in their tranquil depths. As you gaze upon these shimmering waters, you might catch sight of a graceful swan gliding effortlessly, or a playful otter darting below the surface. The rolling hills, blanketed in a shimmer of greens and golds, evoke the nostalgic charm of a postcard, each curve revealing a new breathtaking vista that beckons exploration.

It's one of those rare places where change creeps along slower than a sloth, allowing the landscape to breathe and flourish in its own time. Here, the seasons unfold like a beautifully scripted play: vibrant blooms in spring, lush greenery in summer, a riot of colors in autumn, and a serene blanket of

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snow in winter. This deliberate pace preserves the breathtaking natural beauty that surrounds it, creating a sanctuary for both the weary traveler seeking solace and the curious adventurer yearning for discovery. In Antrim, every moment feels like a gentle reminder of the magic that exists in the world, waiting to be explored and cherished.

Our house is conveniently perched right on the edge of downtown Antrim, where the occasional influx of traffic can feel overwhelming. Yet, amidst the hustle and bustle, there are moments when you can actually hear your own thoughts. The true peace and quiet envelops us during those late-night hours, when the world outside settles into a soft hush. It's during these tranquil moments that I find myself plopping down on the back deck, a warm blanket wrapped around my shoulders, soaking in the profound silence that envelops us. As I gaze up at the star-studded sky, I can't help but wonder where the hell all that time went, lost in the beauty and stillness of this magical place.

My back deck is my sanctuary, a place where I find solace, dream big, shed tears, and chart my future every day. It has become my guiding star, illuminating my thoughts and aspirations. The weathered boards beneath my feet cradle memories, some vivid and others long forgotten, each telling a story of moments spent in reflection.

Every morning, I sit here with my steaming cup of tea, the warmth seeping into my hands, as I watch the soft light filter through the rustling leaves of the trees. The gentle rustle of the branches and the chirping of early birds create a serene symphony that wraps around me like a comforting blanket. In these quiet moments, I wish for time to slow down, savoring the stillness before the world awakens and the day's responsibilities come rushing in. This deck is more than just wood and nails; it is a canvas for my thoughts, a stage for my hopes, and a refuge where I can dream freely without interruption.

I'm a father, a husband, a very imperfect man, but a man nonetheless, a man whose heart has been shaped more by absence than by presence. For

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instance, I don't go to funerals or any services anymore. Not one. I can't. My last funeral was for my closest grandfather, almost 18 years ago. On that day, I felt something deep, break inside me. It was not just a fracture; it felt more like a severing, a piece of my spine perhaps, or a fragment from the brightest corner of my heart. That broken piece somehow managed to squirm its way around my body, disturbing every delicate balance it touched before finally settling down somewhere profound and unknown, changing me forever.

From that day forth, as I sat, stood, and walked through the ensuing days and months, my posture, my role, my body, and my soul began to drain away, little by little. Each step felt heavy, as if I was carrying the weight of that absence with me, a silent burden that reshaped my existence. I found myself avoiding gatherings, shying away from moments that might evoke memories of loss. The laughter of friends and family felt like a distant echo, a reminder of what I could no longer bear to confront.

As the years passed, I became a ghost in my own life, drifting through the motions, a mere shadow of who I once was. The warmth of connection faded, replaced by a chilling solitude that enveloped me. I often wondered if others could see the cracks in my façade, the way I smiled but never truly felt joy. My heart, once vibrant and full, now pulsed with a muted rhythm, echoing the absence of those I had lost.

In the quiet moments, when the world around me fell silent, I would reflect on my grandfather's life, the wisdom he imparted, and the love he shared. I realized that while he was gone, the lessons he taught me remained, woven into the fabric of my being. Yet even those memories became bittersweet, a reminder of the void his absence left behind.

So here I am, a father and a husband, navigating the complexities of life with a heart that has been irrevocably changed. I strive to be present for my own family, to fill the spaces that grief has hollowed out, yet I carry the weight of my losses like an invisible cloak. In moments of laughter with my

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children, I sometimes catch a glimpse of joy, but it is often tinged with the sorrow of what is missing.

I wonder if I will ever learn to embrace the light again, to find a balance between the love I feel for those still with me and the ache of those who are not. Perhaps, in time, I will discover a way to honor their memory while allowing myself to truly live, to reclaim the pieces of my heart that still yearn for connection. Until then, I remain a man shaped by absence, forever seeking a way to heal and find peace amidst the echoes of my past.

Gramps' loss was catastrophic for me, and not simply because he couldn't hold on long enough to meet my soon-to-be-born son, who was now only a few months away. He had waited a long time for this moment, and so had I. I was forty, and the journey to fatherhood had been long and arduous. I had envisioned the day when Gramps would cradle my son in his arms, sharing stories from his own childhood, passing down wisdom that could only come from a life well-lived.

But the crushing reality hit me like a tidal wave when I realized that this meeting would never happen. In that instant, a profound emptiness settled in my chest, a void that I knew could never be filled. I was devastated, grappling with the weight of grief that felt both overwhelming and suffocating. I knew then that I was over, that a part of me had fractured, irreparably.

The thought of enduring more painful goodbyes was simply unbearable. I had already endured so much loss; each farewell carved deeper scars into my heart. If I were to keep pace with this relentless cycle of grief, somehow placing myself in the midst of more and more heart-wrenching farewells, I knew it would be my undoing. The idea of facing another goodbye paralyzed me with fear. It was a path I could not bear to tread again, for I understood all too well the toll it would take on my spirit.

So, I grieve in quiet and at opportune times, as well as in inconvenient private ways. It often strikes me at night, when everyone else is asleep and

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the world around me is enveloped in silence. In those still moments, I find myself losing my breath, feeling a weight pressing down on my chest, as if the very air is thick with sorrow. I buckle slightly under the heaviness of my own emotions, struggling to maintain my composure.

One particularly vivid memory comes to mind: I was in the middle of Shaw's, a local grocery store, when all of a sudden, tears poured down my face like faucets on full blast. It was as if the dam holding back my emotions had finally broken, and I was powerless to stop it. In a moment of desperation, I grabbed a box of tissues from the shelf, a purchase I didn't anticipate needing. The irony wasn't lost on me; I hadn't chosen the brand my wife preferred, a brand that was often a source of gentle teasing between us, as she always insisted it was the only one worth buying. Now, here I was, standing in the aisle, feeling vulnerable and exposed, clutching this unfamiliar box with a sense of defeat. I knew I would have to keep them in my truck, a constant reminder of what I had lost and the moments that would never return.

Another time, I experienced a wave of grief while dropping off an Amazon return at the ever-reliable and always-there-for-us local Radio Shack in Hillsboro. This store had been a comforting constant in our lives, a place where we sought both gadgets and advice, often sharing a friendly word with the staff who seemed to recognize us as part of their extended family. Yet, as I stood there, surrounded by the familiar sights of blinking electronics and the soft hum of conversations, I felt an overwhelming sense of loss washing over me.

That's the shape of me now, and it is not necessarily an unwanted one. It represents a transformation, a blend of experiences that have sculpted my identity in both profound and complex ways. It is a better shape, reflecting growth and resilience, yet it is also a worse one, carrying the weight of struggles and the scars of past battles.

I show up for my family. They are my focus, my purpose, and my everything. Everything and everyone else, no offense intended, may occupy only one

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percent of my remaining viable brain cells. I make sure to keep a roof over our heads, change the oil on schedule, and kiss my wife's temple with the reverence of a sacred ritual. I constantly seek out ways to ensure that we will not have to rely solely on social security in our later years.

Each morning, I awaken to the delicate dance of sunlight filtering through our window, casting gentle patterns on the walls. I take a moment to appreciate the soft rustle of leaves outside, the way they sway in the breeze as if whispering secrets of the day to come. The aroma of freshly brewed coffee wafts through the air, a comforting ritual that signals the start of our day together.

When she laughs, her eyes sparkle with warmth, and I can't help but laugh along with her, sharing in the joy of our life together. There's an infectious quality to her laughter that brightens even the dullest moments, transforming the mundane into something magical. In that laughter, I find a sense of belonging, a connection that deepens with each passing moment. It's as if we're painting a portrait of memories, each brush stroke vibrant with the colors of our shared experiences.

I cherish the quiet evenings spent on our porch, watching the sun dip below the horizon, painting the sky in hues of orange and pink. As the vibrant colors blend and swirl, the world around us fades, and it's just the two of us, wrapped in the comfort of each other's presence. The soft breeze carries the sweet scent of blooming flowers, and the gentle chirping of crickets provides a soothing soundtrack to our unhurried moments together.

In those tranquil hours, I realize that life is about the love that fills our lives, transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary. Each evening becomes a canvas for our shared experiences, where every glance exchanged and every laugh echoes with the warmth of our connection. With every whispered secret and gentle touch, I grow more aware of the beauty that surrounds us, an endless journey of discovery, hand in hand with my beloved.

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We often find ourselves deeply immersed in conversation, sharing our dreams for the future while also reminiscing about the cherished memories that shape who we are. As the stars begin to twinkle overhead, casting a gentle glow upon our surroundings, I feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude for these precious moments. They serve as a grounding force amidst the chaos that life often presents us. It is within this simple yet profound act of being present together that I discover true fulfillment. This experience is a powerful reminder that love is not merely a fleeting feeling; rather, it is a steadfast presence that enriches and enhances our lives in countless ways.

As the night unfolds and the stars continue to twinkle in the vast sky, I am reminded that these moments are the true essence of life. They are the building blocks of our relationship, creating a foundation that will support us through the trials and tribulations that undoubtedly lie ahead. Together, we are crafting a narrative filled with joy, resilience, and unwavering support, ensuring that no matter what challenges we face, our love remains a constant source of strength and inspiration.

Meet Mr. Carpenter...

It was July, a time of year that typically signaled the height of summer. Yet, this season had unfolded quite differently. So far, it had been a rather cool and rainy summer, with cloud cover dominating the skies more often than not. The few sunny days we had were fleeting, like whispers of warmth that barely touched the earth. However, on this particular day, the sun finally broke free from the oppressive clouds, and when it did, it was nothing short of glorious. It emerged with a force that was both exhilarating and overwhelming. The sun wasn't just hot; it was vindictive in its intensity, casting its rays down upon us with a fervor as if it had unfinished business with the earth that it was eager to attend to.

As I stepped out onto the porch, I cradled my usual mug of green tea in my hands. The warm ceramic felt soothing against my skin, a comforting gesture that seemed almost redundant given the already sweltering

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morning heat that wrapped around me like a thick blanket. I squinted against the brightness, which felt invasive and arrogant, as if the sun was asserting its dominance over the day. Heat like this doesn't merely arrive; it declares war on the senses, demanding acknowledgment and respect.

Adding insult to the injury of the relentless heat, I found myself beneath the shade of my own sanctuary, where the familiar, raspy chorus of carpenter bees echoed around me. Their industrious buzzing filled the air, a constant reminder of their tireless work. You would think, with the number of holes they had chewed into my deck, that we were keeping them as pets, their miniature homes woven into the very structure of my outdoor space. Each hole was a testament to their relentless energy, a sign of their commitment to their craft, but also a nagging reminder of the ongoing battle between nature and my need for a well-kept home.

Their rhythm is unnerving, a dissonant melody that grates on my nerves. It is not the innocent buzz of pollinators diligently doing God's work in the garden. No, this was something far more sinister, a symphony of creatures drilling into my deck with a singular purpose and insatiable hunger, exhibiting a kind of persistence that makes you question who the true intruder is in this space. They bore holes like seasoned contractors, efficient and tireless, utterly indifferent to the feelings and sentiment I had invested in and around this porch.

The sound doesn't merely irritate me; it gnaws at my brain, burrowing into my thoughts like those relentless creatures burrowing into the wood. It disrespects the precious quiet I had earned in this home, a sanctuary I had crafted for peace and reflection. I can even hear them during the dark, quiet hours of the night, when the world outside should be still and serene. Can you believe it? The relentless tapping and drilling invade my thoughts; a harsh reminder of their presence that disrupts the quietness I so desperately seek. It's nothing short of maddening.

I often find myself gazing intently at the two traps I installed, simple contraptions that are both functional and unassuming. They are composed

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of half wood and half plastic, crafted with the intention to catch without any unnecessary fanfare. These little prisons are designed specifically for the small vandals that have been invading my space. The original idea behind these traps was to facilitate humane removal, perhaps even serve as a passive deterrent to discourage future intrusions. But what I truly yearned for was silence, a return to serenity in my surroundings. I longed for sovereignty over my sacred space, a sanctuary free from disturbance. Then, quite unexpectedly, as if the universe had conspired to reveal a twist in my story, I looked down and saw that we had caught one. As I peered closer, I realized he looked remarkably familiar, stirring a mix of emotions within me as I contemplated the implications of this small creature's presence in my life.

I walked over, my steps slow and deliberate, and peered inside the dimly lit container. There he was, a small, desperate body flailing with a mix of precision and panic, yet there was also an unmistakable glimmer of defiance in his movements. He wasn't merely squirming; he was actively objecting and doing so quite vocally. "Didn't learn your lesson, did you?" I muttered under my breath, trying to channel some sort of fictional mobster persona, the kind you might find in a classic film. I half-smirked at my own remark, but the humor didn't quite land. There was no audience present to share in the moment, and I knew that even if there had been, my attempt at humor would have fallen flat. The seriousness of the situation hung in the air like a heavy fog, dampening any lightheartedness I had hoped to evoke.

I had let many others go before, a decision that often left me questioning my own motives. I am not entirely sure why I felt compelled to release them; it seemed to contradict the very purpose of my actions. Sometimes, I would find myself walking out to the enclosure, observing one of the creatures pacing anxiously within its plastic chamber. In those moments, a wave of pity or perhaps guilt would wash over me, prompting me to pop the lid open and set them free without a second thought. But this one? This

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particular creature? I made a conscious choice to leave him in there, a decision that weighed heavily on my mind.

I don't know why I felt this way. Perhaps it was because I was exhausted, my mind was weary from the constant hustle of life. Maybe I simply needed something, anything, to remain still in a world that constantly spins and shifts around me. Or perhaps, deep down, I craved some form of reassurance, a tangible reminder that not everything that collides with you in life has to be avoided or avoided at all costs. Sometimes, it seems, the things that challenge us are the very things that can teach us the most.

Hour after hour, under the relentless heat of the sun, I trudged past him, battling against the overwhelming urge to turn back and reach out. Each step felt heavier than the last, as I tried to will myself into the difficult decision of letting him go. The air was thick and stifling, weighing down on my shoulders, but I knew that this was a moment I had to face.

Each hour transformed into a delicate negotiation within my mind. One part of me, the part I inherited from Gramps, the part that had been shaped by his teachings and influenced by his unwavering belief in quiet dignity, urged me to show compassion. I thought I heard Gramps say, "Set him free," as if trying to awaken a sense of empathy deep within me. "You're not this hard." Yet, the other part of me, the version that had been more recently forged by the relentless trials of grief, weariness, and the absurdities of this ever-nonsensical world, countered with a dismissive thought, "It's just a bee." The struggle within me swirled like a tempest, torn between the weight of my heritage and the harsh realities that clouded my judgment. I found myself wrestling with conflicting impulses, caught in a moment where compassion and indifference clashed, as I pondered the significance of a single, small life.

Isn't it strange how we make decisions about what is truly worth saving? How can we so easily dismiss the value of one *life* in order to preserve the comfort and safety of our own existence? It raises profound questions about our priorities and the moral dilemmas we face. What criteria do we

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use to weigh the significance of another life against our own comfort? How do we justify such choices, and what does that say about us as individuals and as a society?

Then, all of a sudden, it came.

My unraveling.

I unraveled like a well-worn sweater, slowly pulled apart by the relentless hands of regret, stitch by delicate stitch, until I stood completely bare, exposed to the chilling winds of my past. Each thread that came undone revealed a deeper layer of my vulnerabilities, until there was nothing left to protect me from the harsh realities I had tried so desperately to hide. The unraveling felt like an inevitable descent into a void, where every loose thread told a story of choices made and opportunities lost, leaving me stripped of the comfort I once found in my tightly woven facade.

This moment became the saddest and most emotional point in my life, a pivotal experience that would shape my very being in ways I never anticipated. It would change me forever, leaving an indelible mark on my heart and soul that I will never be able to fully overcome. Never. The weight of this experience lingers with me, a constant reminder of the pain and sorrow that accompanied it. It is a moment that I will carry with me always, influencing my thoughts and actions in ways I am still coming to understand.

I stepped outside, tea in hand, and found him standing there, just as he always did. But this time, he was moving a bit slower, almost as if he were savoring each moment. His movements seemed dulled, reduced to deliberate gestures that were calculated and measured. He wasn't pacing back and forth as he often did in moments of anxiety. He wasn't panicking or fidgeting, as though the weight of the world was pressing down on his shoulders. No, he was simply waiting, standing still in the warm glow of the afternoon sun. And then, I swear on my life, he turned and looked right into my eyes, piercing through the distance that usually separated us. In that

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moment, it felt as if he was searching for something deep within me, a connection that transcended the silence between us.

Not in a vague manner. Not merely the incidental line-of-sight that you might perceive from things that are trapped or confined. He looked deeply *into* me, as if he were searching for something hidden within, something that lay beneath the surface of my exterior.

I froze, my jaw agape, caught in a moment of disbelief. A whirlwind of emotions swirled within me, and I wasn't quite sure if I was truly seeing what lay before me or if my mind was merely playing tricks. Yet, amid the uncertainty, something ancient stirred deep within my core, a primal force that was both old and knowing, tinged with an undercurrent of fear. It was as if I had awakened a long-dormant instinct, one that echoed through the ages, warning me of the unknown.

Compelled by a mix of curiosity and trepidation, I took a cautious step closer, inching forward with a mix of fascination and dread. Two feet away from the trap, I paused momentarily, my heart pounding in my chest. Then, stepping forward again, I was just one foot away, my senses heightened, each detail around me becoming more vivid. Finally, I found myself right up against the trap, my breath caught in my throat as I squinted, trying to see him more clearly, to comprehend the enigma before me.

Our gazes met, a strange connection forming in that brief instant, and I felt a jolt of understanding pass between us. There was intelligence in his eyes, a depth that seemed to transcend our worlds. And then, with an air of calmness that belied the tension of the moment, he lifted his front leg high into the air, pointing it directly at me as if to say something profound. In that single, deliberate motion, he tapped the plastic of the trap. The sound echoed sharply in the stillness around us, a simple but crucial gesture that sent shivers down my spine. It was a call to action, a plea for understanding, and at that moment, I knew that everything was about to change.

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Just one leg. One beautiful little leg, delicate and exquisite in its own right. It wasn't frantic. It wasn't a reflex, a mere reaction to stimulus. No, it was something entirely different, something profound and deeply emotional. He was reaching out to me, extending that singular, perfect leg as if to bridge the distance between us, to connect in a way that words could not express. And at that moment, I broke. I broke completely, shattering into a million pieces. It was a violent and thorough breaking, a fracture of my very essence. The weight of that small gesture overwhelmed me, stirring emotions I had long buried deep within. The beauty of that little leg became a symbol of vulnerability, a reminder of the fragility of life and the deep connections we share with one another.

I collapsed into myself, feeling as though the very essence of my being was folding inwards. My lungs, once accustomed to the rhythm of breath, seemed to forget their purpose, leaving me gasping for air in a moment of overwhelming surrender. My body, instead of reacting with pain, seemed to yield to an unseen force, succumbing to an emotional weight that felt both heavy and liberating at once.

Tears began to swell, gathering in the corners of my eyes, and before I could even process the myriads of emotions swirling within me, they spilled over, cascading down my cheeks like a silent waterfall. I found myself questioning what exactly these tears were mourning; was it the loss of a dream, a piece of myself, or perhaps an unfulfilled hope? Each drop carried with it a fragment of my sorrow, and as they fell, they created a path of clarity through the haze of my confusion.

My chest clenched tightly, but not in the typical sense of a heart attack, something I had experienced before, a familiar terror that gripped me unexpectedly. This was different; it felt as though someone had reached deep inside me, gently but firmly squeezing my heart, a reminder that it was still tender and vulnerable. In that moment, I became acutely aware of the fragility of my emotions, each pang echoing the unspoken struggles I had

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yet to confront. The world around me faded into a distant blur, and all that remained was the raw, unfiltered experience of my own heartache.

I cried with abandon, a deep, wrenching release of emotion that felt almost primal. This was not the kind of cinematic grieving we often see in movies, where tears flow dramatically and people are comforted by the gentle music in the background. No, this was something much rawer and more involuntary, a profound experience that left me feeling exposed and vulnerable. Each sob echoed in my chest, resonating with a painful clarity that made every ordinary sound around me, the rustle of leaves, the distant chatter of passersby, transform into an orchestra of grief and longing.

In that moment, I wasn't just crying for the bee, a tiny creature whose life might be extinguished far too soon. My tears were a tribute to every loss I had experienced but never allowed myself to fully confront or mourn. I cried for Gramps, the man whose wisdom and laughter had once filled my life with joy, now a memory that felt like a ghost haunting the corners of my heart. I cried for the childhood moments that were now irretrievable, those fleeting instances of pure bliss that slipped through my fingers like sand.

I wept for the decisions I've made out of exhaustion and anger, choices that were driven by a sense of desperation rather than the guiding light of love. Each tear that fell was a reminder of paths not taken, words left unspoken, and the weight of regret that settled heavily on my shoulders. It was a cathartic release, a moment where the dam of my emotions broke free, flooding my consciousness with all the pain I had buried deep within. In that space of vulnerability, I could almost hear the echoes of all those unprocessed feelings, a symphony of sadness that finally demanded to be acknowledged.

That bee, trapped and slowly dying yet somehow still dignified, raised its leg as if it were presenting a mirror to me. In that reflective moment, I found myself staring deep into the essence of my own soul. Within that mirror, I saw every regret I had ever tucked away for safekeeping, all the missed opportunities and unspoken words that weighed heavily on my heart. Each

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flicker of its fragile legs seemed to echo the choices I had made, illuminating the shadows of my past. It was as if the bee was not merely a creature on the brink of death but a vessel for my own introspection, forcing me to confront the haunting memories I had buried beneath layers of complacency. The air around us grew heavy with unspoken truths, and in that stillness, I realized how much I had neglected to acknowledge my own feelings, my own failures. The bee, in its final moments, became a poignant reminder that life's fragility often compels us to reflect on what truly matters.

I found myself crying harder than I ever had at any funeral, or for any reason in my life. The tears streamed down my face, unrestrained and unstoppable, because at this moment, there were no rules to follow. There were no social scripts dictating how I should behave or how I should express my sorrow. There was no pressure to be composed or to maintain a facade for the comfort of others around me. This grief was raw and unfiltered; it had no etiquette, no boundaries. It simply existed, overwhelming and pure, filling the space around me with its intensity. It enveloped me like a heavy blanket, suffocating yet oddly liberating, allowing me to feel everything without the constraints of societal expectations. All I could do was surrender to the emotion that surged through me, an unrelenting wave that had finally found its release.

I stayed out there for a long time, enveloped in the stillness of the night. Whispering apologies to something that couldn't possibly understand the weight of my words. I longed to give this moment a redemption arc, a chance for healing and forgiveness. But despite my yearning, I found myself unable to transform the sorrow into something beautiful. The silence around me was thick, and each word I uttered seemed to vanish into the void, carrying my regrets with them. It was a painful realization that sometimes, no matter how deeply we wish to amend our mistakes, not every moment can be redeemed.

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I left him there, standing alone in the fading light as the sun dipped below the horizon. It felt surreal, almost as if the universe had conspired to bring us together for that fleeting moment. Even after that incredible, magical connection we shared, one that seemed to transcend time and space, I walked away, my heart heavy with the weight of my decision.

The air was thick with unspoken words and lingering glances, yet I found myself unable to bridge the distance between us. It was as if a powerful force was pulling me in one direction while my mind insisted, I move in another. I could still feel the warmth of his presence, the way our laughter echoed in the stillness, and the electricity that crackled between us like a live wire.

But despite the undeniable chemistry, I knew I had to leave. The connection we forged was too intense, and part of me wanted to stay and explore the depths of what we had discovered. But the reality of my circumstances loomed large, reminding me of the responsibilities and the choices that awaited me beyond that moment. And so, with a heavy heart, I turned away, leaving him behind, even as the memory of our encounter lingered in the air like a sweet, haunting melody.

I think about Gramps often.

He was born in the Bronx around the year 1927, into a family of Ashkenazi Jewish descent. His parents had bravely fled Europe in the tumultuous 1920s, seeking the kind of freedom that many dream about but only a fortunate few ever manage to grasp. The shadows of their past loomed large, for his entire extended family, those who had chosen to remain behind, met a tragic fate, lost to the war that swept through Europe like a relentless tide of hatred and destruction. The pervasive cruelty of that era consumed countless lives, leaving a haunting void in the hearts of those who survived.

Yet, against all odds, they persevered, he survived. When his time came to contribute to a greater cause, he enlisted and served America proudly in the

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Army, specifically in the Philippines. Gramps took on the vital role of a cook, working tirelessly to prepare and serve hot meals to American soldiers who were courageously fighting against the forces of the Nazis and the Japanese. His role was not just that of a cook; it was a crucial support system for the brave men risking their lives on the front lines. He was there, fully present, embodying the spirit of resilience and duty. In a world engulfed by global darkness and despair, he showed up, steadfast and unyielding, ready to play his part in the fight for freedom and justice. His legacy is a testament to the strength of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

He and my grandmother lived a simple life in a modest apartment nestled in the charming town of Larchmont, New York. They didn't chase societal status or material wealth; instead, they pursued a deeper meaning in life. This pursuit of significance was something Gramps and I shared, a bond that connected us in a profound way. We were, in essence, two sides of the same coin, reflecting each other's values and beliefs. I vividly recall my mother once sharing a heartfelt memory with me; she told me that Gramps had expressed to her that he considered me one of his own children. To receive such incredible praise filled my heart with warmth, and it motivated me to strive to make him proud every single day.

Our connection transcended words: we communicated through glances that spoke volumes. There was a shared silence between us that felt almost sacred, like scripture that needed no interpretation. His incredible pale blue eyes, so gentle and wise, held a kindness that could quell the fiercest storm mid-breath, as if the world itself paused to acknowledge his presence. When he passed away, it felt as though I had lost the last map I had to navigate through life, and that this map was the only one left in the entire world. The loss was profound, leaving me adrift in a sea of memories, struggling to find my way without his guiding light.

Mr. Carpenter, trapped and pleading, had eyes like that too.

And that's why I broke.

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Life didn't stop. It never does.

My son is growing up into someone I almost envy. He's just one person, yet he embodies the qualities of generations of family all rolled into one. His kindness is profound, almost to a fault, and for someone his age, he possesses wisdom that seems beyond his years, beyond reason, even. Some people are simply born with an innate understanding of human nature, and while I've spent my life navigating the complexities of being the "brand new" one in various situations, I find myself consistently surprised and emotionally taken aback by the world around me. Commercials can make me tear up unexpectedly, sending my emotions spiraling, while he remains remarkably steady and composed, most of the time.

It's as if he arrived in this world already equipped with insights and knowledge that others might take a lifetime to acquire. He has an extraordinary ability to see through the noise of everyday life, to cut through the superficial layers that often cloud our interactions. When he meets people, he treats them with an intrinsic respect and dignity that doesn't hinge on whether or not they deserve it. His form of kindness is both beautiful and dangerous in this world, where many might take advantage of such openness and vulnerability. However, I've never tried to warn him away from it or suggest that he temper his generosity. Instead, I admire and cherish this quality in him, hoping that he will hold onto it even as he navigates the complexities of life.

As he continues to grow and develop, I often wonder how he will maintain this extraordinary empathy in a world that can sometimes feel cold and unforgiving. I hope that he will always be able to see the good in people, to continue treating others with warmth and kindness, regardless of the circumstances. It's a rare gift he possesses, and I aspire to learn from him, to mirror even a fraction of his unwavering compassion. While I may be the one who has lived longer, I find myself looking up to him, inspired by his outlook on life and the way he embraces the world with an open heart. In

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many ways, he is teaching me what it means to truly care for others, and for that, I am eternally grateful.

I think Gramps would've loved him. I think Gramps would've seen the same fire in him that he saw in me.

Some days, I find myself lost in daydreams, imagining the future and observing my son from the window of our home. He sits on the porch, just as I used to do in my own childhood, cradling a cup of tea in his hands. I watch as he gazes out into the world, his expression one of quiet contemplation, as if he believes that the universe owes him some kind of explanation for all that he sees. It's a moment that fills me with nostalgia, recalling my own youthful days spent in similar reverie.

Meanwhile, his own child plays around on the indoor/outdoor carpet, a whirlwind of energy and curiosity. Barefoot and bold, the little one dances freely, unencumbered by the worries of the world. I can see joy and innocence in those small, quick steps, a reminder of the carefree nature of childhood. The sun filters through the trees, casting playful shadows that seem to join in the dance, creating an atmosphere of warmth and laughter.

In these poignant moments, I find myself reflecting deeply on the intricate circle of life, the relentless passage of time, and the enduring connections that span across generations. It is a profound realization that, despite the inevitable change life brings, certain experiences remain timeless, allowing us to bond in ways that are both simple and profoundly meaningful. As I observe my surroundings, I can't help but smile with warmth and nostalgia, knowing that my son has taken on the role I once held, now sitting in that familiar spot where countless memories were forged. In this very moment, his own child is creating new memories.

It's an incredibly touching reminder that life carries on, a seamless blend of continuity and change, where the essence of our experiences is passed down through the generations in a profound and meaningful way. Each laugh shared, each story told, and each moment experienced together adds

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another beautiful layer to the rich and intricate portrait of our family history. Watching this cycle of life unfold before my eyes fills my heart with immense gratitude and appreciation, as I come to realize that although the faces around me may change over time, the love and the deep connections that bind us together remain steadfast and unwavering.

As I reflect on this cycle, I feel a profound sense of responsibility to nurture and pass on these traditions, to ensure that the love we have cultivated continues to flourish. This journey, with all its twists and turns, is not merely about the moments we capture but about the legacy we leave behind a testament to the enduring power of love, connection, and shared experiences.

Life continues and the trap still hangs, albeit with the ports sealed up tight.

That trap. That simple plastic and wooden box.

I never could take it down.

It has endured through countless seasons, weathered fierce storms, undergone numerous repainting's, and faced various repairs over the years. While others might have cast it aside, viewing it as nothing more than trash, I perceive it as something much more significant. To me, it stands as a monument. A monument not just to regret, but to mercy and compassion, as well. It embodies the unbearable weight of small things, the little moments of life that can sometimes feel insurmountable. Each scratch and dent tell a story, a reminder of the trials faced, and the lessons learned. It serves as a testament to resilience; a symbol of how even the most overlooked objects can hold profound meaning and depth. In its humble existence, it challenges the notion of beauty, inviting us to reflect on the complexities of life and the burdens we carry.

My son has never asked about it, and I've never told the full story until now.

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He glances at it sometimes, not with confusion, but with reverence. The way you look at something that shaped someone you love, even if you'll never quite understand how.

I see myself in him. Sitting where I used to sit, holding the same kind of quiet in his chest. I wonder if one day he'll tell his own children the story. Or maybe he won't. Maybe he'll just let the trap stay, hanging like truth no longer in need of explanation.

I find myself pondering the nature of goodbyes, particularly the one I might have to offer to the people I hold dear. The thought is both daunting and heart-wrenching. What kind of farewell can I truly muster for those I love? I can't help but grapple with the uncertainty of it all, especially when I consider the possibility of my beloved wife departing this world before I do. The sheer thought of losing her is enough to send shivers down my spine and a heaviness into my heart.

If that day ever comes, I can only imagine how she would handle it. I have no doubt that she would greet the moment with her characteristic grace and humor. She'd surely be wearing that radiant smile of hers, the one that lights up the darkest days, and she would likely lean in close, whispering one last "brand new" joke, something clever and unexpected that would catch me off guard. I can picture the way her eyes would twinkle with mischief, as if to say, "Even in this moment, I want you to laugh."

As I envision her final moments, I suspect she'll weave a narrative that is nothing short of poetic. She has always had a way with words, transforming even the simplest of thoughts into something profound and beautiful. Her farewell would likely be a gathering of love and laughter, a bittersweet blend of joy and sorrow that leaves me both stunned and laughing through my tears. In that moment, I would grasp the essence of her spirit, one that never shied away from the complexities of life but embraced them with open arms. It would be a goodbye unlike any other, a testament to the everlasting bond we share, reminding me that love transcends even the most difficult of farewells.

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But I do know this:

I will mourn in my own way. I will grieve what others overlook. I will cry for bees and birds, and my cracked porch rails that remind me of the things I didn't repair in time. That reminds me of a favorite meme...

"If a man tells his wife that he's going to do something, he's going to do it. She doesn't have to remind him every six months."

I will show up for my son. And when I can no longer show up, I'll leave pieces of myself behind. In the stories, in the wood, in the silence that he inherits.

The trap will stay. Not because I forgot what happened, but because I remembered.