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Making The Best of the Rest

Chapter One:

The Turning Point We Don't See Coming

It rarely happens the way we imagine.

Change doesn't arrive with warning signs or trumpet blasts; it comes quietly—disguised as an ordinary day. You pour the morning coffee, feed the dog, open the blinds, and somewhere between those small rituals, something shifts. A thought, an ache, a realization so subtle it's easy to miss. But it's there—the knowing that life will not go back to the way it was.

For me, it wasn't one event. It was the slow accumulation of many small ones. The kind that make you stop mid-step, mid-breath, and wonder when everything began to feel different. The laughter that doesn't come as quickly. The voice you hear less often. The mirror that returns a gaze you barely recognize.

There's a certain cruelty to how gently life changes. We expect storms, but it's usually erosion—steady, quiet, patient. The kind that doesn't destroy overnight, but reshapes the shoreline of who we are grain by grain.

Most people imagine a turning point as something cinematic: a diagnosis, a divorce, a death. But sometimes it's simpler. A quiet drive home from somewhere that used to feel

like home. A pair of shoes by the door that haven't moved in months. The empty chair at breakfast that reminds you that love, no matter how strong, can't outpace time.

I didn't mark the day when I began to see things differently. I only remember standing in the garage one morning, sunlight spilling across the concrete, and realizing how much of my life I had been rushing through. Not out of ambition, but out of habit. Always hurrying to get to the next thing, without realizing that "next" never arrives. It's always "now," dressed differently.

Maybe that's how most turning points begin—not with grand epiphanies, but with awareness creeping in through the smallest cracks of routine.

We build our lives around plans, promises, and the illusion of control. We say things like, *I'll slow down once this project is done. I'll take that trip next year. I'll make things right when I have more time.* But time doesn't wait for permission. It just keeps moving, quietly folding our yesterdays into the past.

And yet, grace has a strange way of appearing in the unraveling. Sometimes it takes something slipping through your hands to remind you what's worth holding onto.

That morning in the garage, I noticed a thin layer of dust on a box marked "Keep." Inside were small things—photos,

letters, pieces of a life that once felt so urgent. But what struck me wasn't nostalgia. It was clarity. I realized that the best parts of those moments weren't the achievements or possessions; it was how I *felt* in them—connected, alive, present. That's what I'd lost without noticing.

The turning point came when I stopped trying to rebuild what was and started asking a quieter question: *What if what's left is enough?*

It's a humbling question, but it opens a door. Because "enough" is rarely about abundance—it's about attention. It's about seeing what's already here with the eyes of someone who nearly missed it.

When you start living that way, ordinary moments gain depth. The morning light on the table becomes sacred. The sound of the wind through the trees feels like a conversation. Even grief softens—not because it disappears, but because you begin to see it as proof of how deeply you've lived.

I've met people who discovered this truth too late—when their bodies slowed before their spirits did. They'd tell me, "I wish I'd paid attention sooner." And I understood. Because it's easy to fill life with noise: schedules, screens, opinions. But presence has a quiet frequency that only reveals itself when you turn down the volume.

The real turning points in life don't scream; they whisper. They ask:

Will you notice?

Will you listen?

Will you let this change you?

I remember one evening in Port Isabel, long after Melody had gone inside, when I stayed by the water just to listen. The air was still warm, the tide soft. A pelican floated by, unhurried. I thought about how nature never resists its own seasons. The tree doesn't cling to summer leaves. The tide doesn't argue with the moon. Everything changes as it must.

And maybe that's the lesson. Maybe wisdom isn't about learning how to hold on—it's learning how to move with grace when life insists on changing form.

That night, I wrote in my journal:

Maybe the turning point isn't a moment at all.

Maybe it's the moment you realize you've already turned.

I closed the notebook and sat in the quiet for a long time. The stars shimmered above the water like reflections of everything still possible.

What I felt wasn't regret—it was relief. Because I knew I didn't have to chase the past anymore. I just had to keep walking forward, eyes open, heart steady, learning how to make the best of what remained.

That's how change finds us—not as an ending, but as a quiet beginning disguised as loss.

And if we listen carefully enough, that's when we start to hear the most important sound of all—

the still, small voice that whispers,

“You're still here. Begin again.”

What Ends Without Ending

We think of endings as final, but they rarely are.

Most endings in life are more like commas than periods—pauses that ask us to breathe before beginning again. They arrive disguised as losses, departures, or quiet goodbyes, yet something always lingers: a lesson, a scent, a memory that refuses to fade. Life, it seems, is not in the business of erasing—it simply keeps rewriting.

The hard part is that we're conditioned to equate ending with failure. The job lost. The friendship that fades. The body that slows. Each feels like a verdict instead of a transition. But if we could see from a wider view, we might realize that nothing in life truly disappears—it just changes shape.

When my mother passed, I remember sitting in the silence afterward, wondering where all her warmth had gone. The house felt thinner, the air strange. For weeks, I walked through each room half expecting her voice, her laugh, her gentle way of making ordinary moments matter. But grief, as it turns out, is just love with nowhere to go.

Over time, I stopped searching for her presence in the usual places and began to notice her in unexpected ways. In the way light fell across the kitchen counter the same way it used to in her home. In the soft discipline of her old advice echoing in my choices. In the hibiscus that somehow bloomed again after I thought it was gone for good. Her life hadn't ended—it had simply folded into mine.

What ends without ending is what truly belongs to us.

There's an ache that comes from trying to keep things as they were. We chase permanence in a world built on impermanence. We try to preserve the exact sound of laughter, the way someone said our name, the texture of the life we once lived. But everything that matters most is living—breathing, moving, becoming.

If we hold too tightly, we strangle what we love.
If we release too soon, we grieve what we might have kept.
Somewhere in the middle is grace: the ability to let things change without losing their meaning.

Melody once told me, during one of our quieter evenings, that healing isn't about getting back to who you were—it's about becoming who you are now. That truth landed differently. It wasn't about recovery; it was about reinvention through acceptance.

So I began to pay attention to the small closures that used to frustrate me: the season that ended too soon, the project that never became what I envisioned, the friendships that drifted out of view. I started to ask—not why did this end, but what did it give? What part of me grew through it?

And slowly, I noticed that each ending carried an invisible inheritance. The love that didn't last taught me what honesty required. The failures I once hid became teachers of humility. Even regret, that relentless companion, softened into understanding when I looked at it through gratitude instead of guilt.

The truth is, life rarely closes doors completely. It leaves them ajar just enough for light to pass through. We can look back, not to live there, but to see how far we've come.

There's a quiet dignity in acknowledging that some chapters can't be reopened. You can visit them, but you can't move back in. When I realized that, something in me relaxed. I no longer felt the need to fix or relive what had passed. Instead, I could honor it by living differently.

The past, I learned, is not a prison—it's a teacher that eventually lets you graduate.

What ends without ending also includes the people we've been.

Versions of ourselves that no longer fit, yet deserve our compassion.

The younger man who thought he had to earn love through effort.

The husband who measured worth through provision rather than presence.

The son who didn't yet understand what his parents had quietly sacrificed.

They aren't mistakes to be erased—they're chapters that made the story possible.

When we learn to bless what has ended, it transforms from loss into lineage. We begin to live not as someone starting over, but as someone continuing beautifully.

In Aikido, there's a principle that applies perfectly here: *everything continues*. Movement, energy, connection—none of it stops; it merely changes direction. What appears as defeat in one instant becomes harmony in the next when you stop resisting it. Life works the same way.

The turning points that break us are also the ones that build us.

But the building is slow. It happens in the quiet hours when no one's watching, when you're learning to live without what you thought you needed.

There's a kind of freedom that only follows surrender—the moment you stop asking life to return what it took and begin to notice what it left.

One night by the water, I thought about all the people who had shaped my journey. Some are still part of my daily rhythm; others are now only echoes that visit in memory. Yet the love remains unchanged. It simply learned to speak another language.

It speaks in patience.
In the ability to forgive without hearing an apology.
In the instinct to be kind when no one will notice.

That's how love endures—quietly, invisibly, unendingly.

Maybe that's what “making the best of the rest” really means.
It's not about starting over—it's about continuing forward with deeper eyes.
To see that nothing truly vanishes.
To trust that the best things in life don't end; they evolve.

When I look at Melody, I see that truth reflected back. Every scar she carries, every change she's lived through, tells the same story: endings are only visible from one side. On the other, there's transformation.

And maybe one day, when our time comes to become memories ourselves, someone will hold a moment of us—not the way we looked or what we owned, but the way we loved, the way we stayed kind when life wasn't.

That's what lasts.
That's what refuses to end.

So when the next ending arrives, I hope to greet it differently—not with resistance, but with reverence. Because endings, when blessed, become beginnings in disguise.

And maybe, just maybe, that's how eternity works. Not as an endless stretch of time—but as a life well-lived, continuing quietly through the ones who remember.

What We Carry Forward

There comes a time when you begin to understand that life's truest weight isn't in what you hold—it's in what you carry *well*.

Over the years, I've carried plenty: responsibilities, regrets, lessons learned too late, laughter from long ago. But the older I get, the more I realize that not everything deserves to make the trip forward. Some things are meant to stay behind as monuments, not luggage.

We think memory is about holding on. It isn't.
It's about carrying light through the dark.

When I left Illinois that last autumn morning, the frost had crept across the windshield like lace. The air carried that stillness unique to the Midwest before winter—everything waiting, pausing, ready to rest. I remember locking the front door and standing there for a moment, knowing that what I was leaving behind wasn't just a house—it was a version of myself that had done his best.

I didn't know it then, but that pause before the first step was holy. Because the hardest part of any new beginning is saying a quiet thank-you to what's over.

The road to Port Isabel stretches long and familiar now. I've memorized its rhythm—the rise and fall of landscapes, the way the sky widens somewhere near Austin, the first sight of palm trees standing like sentinels at the edge of the Gulf. Each mile is an inventory of what to keep and what to let go.

I carry my mother's night-blooming cereus—a fragile lineage of her care and patience. It blooms rarely, but when it does, the air fills with a fragrance you never forget. I carry Melody's laughter, which sounds like the echo of sunlight. I carry forgiveness—for myself, for others, for all the unfinished things that never became what I once hoped.

We all have invisible suitcases. Some are filled with noise we mistake for necessity—old arguments, unspoken words, the need to be understood. Others hold quieter things: the sound of

a loved one's voice, a lesson from a mentor, the feel of a hand that steadied you when you were falling apart.

If you look closely, you can tell what kind of traveler someone is by how they carry what they've been given. Some drag the past behind them until it scrapes them raw. Others balance it like a candle—steady enough to light the way, gentle enough not to burn.

I used to drag. Now I try to carry.

Carrying is different from clinging. It's choosing what continues through you, not what confines you. It's letting memory become meaning.

When I walk along the shore here in Port Isabel, I sometimes think about the strange cargo we all bear. Every footprint in the sand is temporary, but it shows we were here. The waves erase it, but that doesn't make it meaningless. Its purpose was to remind us of the step, not the permanence.

So it is with the past.

There's a particular comfort in carrying something small but sacred. For me, it's the black-and-white photo of my mother standing in her garden, hands on her hips, pride and patience etched across her face. She looks strong, but not in the way the world measures strength. Her kind of strength was quiet—rooted, patient, unpretending.

That picture reminds me that what we inherit isn't always what's said—it's what's *shown*.

I carry that.

I also carry my father's absence—the years I didn't know him, the questions that died unanswered. Oddly enough, that void has its own weight, but not all weight is bad. Some of it keeps you grounded. Some of it teaches empathy for others' unseen burdens.

Every time I meet someone who's grieving, I recognize that same look in their eyes—the quiet arithmetic of what was lost and what remains. We don't heal by denying that equation; we heal by balancing it differently.

That's the work of carrying forward.

Not everything from our past deserves equal weight. Some things need to be forgiven; others need to be blessed; a few need to be remembered exactly as they were so we can learn what not to repeat.

But occasionally, something rare happens—you find a memory so full of truth that it doesn't grow heavy no matter how long you hold it. Those are the ones that sustain us. They become part of our posture, our patience, our peace.

Melody carries her own invisible stories. She doesn't speak of them often, but sometimes in the evening when the day

quiets, I see her look toward the horizon as if listening for voices that time has softened but not erased. Her resilience reminds me that we don't have to outgrow our past to outlive it—we just have to learn how to walk beside it.

We carry more than memories—we carry people.
Their voices guide us in ways they never could while alive.
Their laughter returns in moments of joy we can't explain.
Their faith echoes in our choices when no one else is watching.

That's the mystery of love—it doesn't vanish, it migrates.

Even the pain we once cursed finds a gentler shape over time. It becomes compassion. You begin to understand why some people did what they did, why you reacted how you did, why it all had to unfold as it did. That's not justification—it's liberation.

The truth is, we don't get to choose everything we carry, but we do get to decide *how*.

We can carry bitterness until it spills into every new conversation, or we can carry wisdom and let it season our kindness. We can carry judgment or grace. One weighs us down; the other lifts us quietly from within.

And when the day comes to lay it all down, maybe what matters most isn't how much we gathered—but how lightly we traveled.

Sometimes I think about what my life might look like as a single, long procession of things I chose to keep. The memories, the lessons, the faces. I imagine each one as a stone placed carefully along a path. Together, they form something like a mosaic—imperfect, uneven, but beautiful because of it.

That's what legacy really is: not what we own, but what we've carried well enough to pass along.

I hope that when people remember me, they'll say I traveled lighter toward the end—not because I had less, but because I needed less. Because I'd finally learned that love doesn't need proof, that peace doesn't need performance, and that presence—quiet, steady, unassuming—is the only real possession worth carrying.

So, what do I carry forward now?
Faith—not as doctrine, but as direction.
Love—not as a feeling, but as a daily choice.
Hope—not as wishful thinking, but as a discipline.

Everything else can stay behind.

And perhaps that's the secret to making the best of the rest—
not by filling our arms with more,
but by freeing our hands for what still matters.

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