Small Pleasures

© 2026 Daniela Henry

Auflage (*nur anzugeben, sofern es nicht die erste Auflage des Buches ist*)

Umschlagkunstwerk von Carol Marine

Druck und Vertrieb im Auftrag von Daniela Henry:
Buchschmiede von Dataform Media GmbH
Julius-Raab-Straße 8, 2203 Großebersdorf, Österreich

www.buchschmiede.at – Folge deinem Buchgefühl!
Kontaktadresse nach EU-Produktsicherheitsverordnung:
info@buchschmiede.at

ISBN: 978-3-99203-517-5 (Paperback)
Printed in Austria

Das Werk, einschließlich seiner Teile, ist urheberrechtlich geschützt. Jede Verwertung ist ohne Zustimmung des Verlages und der:s Autor:in unzulässig. Dies gilt insbesondere für die elektronische oder sonstige Vervielfältigung, Übersetzung, Verbreitung und öffentliche Zugänglichmachung.

For everyone who knows there was enough room for Leonardo DiCaprio on that door.

To my parents, for always loving and supporting me. There wasn't a parenting book in the world that could have prepared you for my weirdness.

Most importantly, though, dedicated to the strongest person I know: me, as well as J.H., my heart, W.H., my light and rock, always.

“If there's a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it.” – Toni Morrison

“Each book has to teach you how to write it.”
– Salman Rushdie

“Lies will flow from my lips, but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them; it is for you to seek out this truth and to decide whether any part of it is worth keeping.” – Virginia Woolf, A Room of One’s Own

Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by things you didn’t do than by the ones you did do. So, throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover. – Mark Twain

Man muss auch das Allgemeinste persönlich darstellen.
– Hokusai

“We are all just walking each other home.” – Ram Dass

Table of Contents

.Coffee Stories..... 1
.Till Death Do Us Part..... 5
.Artificial Intelligence Cannot. 9
.Hello, It's Me, the French Louvre Thief. 13
.When We Met Count Dracula. 16
.Bloodwork..... 21
.An Imagined Conversation Between Construction Workers Next to My Hotel Room. 23
.When Money Is No Issue..... 26
.New Automatic Caller Menu Options From My Bank.30
.Small Pleasures. 34
.Japanese Toilets..... 41
.How to Live Longer (and Live a Lonely Sad Life). 44
.The Number 1 Thing I Learned in My Career. 47
.Necessary List for Having a Baby. 51
.Valentine's Day Fun. 55
.On Self-Pity..... 60
.Things to Say to a Child..... 65
.The Future of Dating..... 69
.Introduction to Free Time. 75

.It Is What It Is. 79
.Overspending or Spirited Awat. 83
.Phone Addiction. 89
.Why Can’t I Be As Smart As You?. 93
.Gyno Advice. 96
.Mom, how was it to grow up in the 80s and 90s?..... 101
.Math Problems for Moms. 105
.Is It a Problem to Have Too Many Books?. 110
.How to Avoid Someone Annoying at the Bus Stop (or in Life)..... 115
.What I Tell Myself When Things Get Too Much. 118
.Unhappy Beauties. 124
.Fiction Is Freedom. 128
.How to Own a Smartphone and Still Be a Functioning Human Being. 131
.45..... 135
.The World Inside You. 145
Into life. 147
.Japan 2.0 – Or Why I Could Never Live in Japan. 148
.How to Take Leisure Seriously. 157
.Embracing “la rentrée”. 162
.How to Stay in a Relationship. 167

.How to Exist in the 21st Century Without Having Anxiety or a Panic Attack. 170

.It's Friday. Let's Get Sober as Fuck. 174

.How to Detect Fake Friends. 178

If the reader prefers, this book may be regarded as fiction. But there is always the chance that such a book of fiction may throw some light on what has been written as fact.

Coffee Stories

I bought this amazing SMEG coffee machine a couple of months ago. This is what the instruction manual said:

Welcome to your new high-end Italian espresso machine. Or should we say buongiorno? Yes, we should. Your espresso machine only speaks Italian. To get the most out of the machine, you must learn the language.

We will wait.

FOURTEEN MONTHS LATER.

Remove the machine from the box. Carefully. You want to make a good first impression. Use a firm, yet gentle grip to establish trust. Too weak a grip, and your high-end Italian espresso machine will never respect you.

Important safeguard: Don't film an unboxing video. Your espresso machine is wary about having a social media presence. Between you and me, it held some questionable beliefs during WWII and doesn't want the public to uncover it.

Your Italian espresso machine is perfect for daily use; however, please keep in mind that the machine demands time off to rest, so daily use doesn't really "work" for it.

To set your machine up, find the area of your house with the best lighting. We know the kitchen will be the most convenient, but this isn't about you. This is about getting

the best extraction, and your Italian espresso machine will feel self-conscious if it thinks the sunlight in your breakfast nook is hitting its metal in the wrong way. If you want your machine to function properly or even at all, get a professional photographer-grade light meter and wave it around your house like it's a smudging stick.

Plug it in.

Now that your espresso machine is set up, check on its emotional well-being. Is it comfortable? How would it describe its feelings? Is the sunlight too direct? Ask if it feels as if it can produce today.

We'll save you the trouble: It will say it cannot produce today. Try again tomorrow.

A DAY LATER.

Your high-end Italian espresso machine is now ready for use.

Fill the tank with water. Use bottled water. Never tap. Never filtered. Please refer to the "approved bottled water brands" list at the end of this instruction manual (see: Italian espresso machine rider). If you use a brand it doesn't like, the machine will be able to detect it and will shut down.

Grind the espresso beans into the provided coffee filter basket.

Throw out the ground espresso beans. Reevaluate your coffee choices. Really take your time. Go on a journey. Come back when you've purchased beans that can live up to the high standards of your high-end Italian espresso machine.

THREE WEEKS LATER.

If your high-end Italian espresso machine is on its phone when you try to use it, don't be alarmed. It's chatting with its cousin. Please wait for the machine to finish its call before you attempt to use it. You may be tempted to eavesdrop now that you are fluent in Italian, but this is a personal call, so please respect the machine's privacy.

If you must know, they're discussing where the cuff of a polo shirt should fall to best showcase a bicep.

Select one shot or two shots. Please know that your machine will dispense how much it feels like, regardless of your selection.

If your machine is reluctant to perform, play the Shia LaBeouf "you can do it" video for motivation. Your high-end Italian espresso machine hasn't seen it yet, despite being a huge fan of Shia LaBeouf. Again, it makes excellent espresso—so we can forgive its support of problematic actors or former dictators.

Eventually, your high-end Italian espresso machine will produce espresso. It might be in five minutes. It might be

at midnight. It might never be. But it will come. Unless it doesn't.

THREE YEARS LATER.

Your high-end Italian espresso machine demands cleaning every two months. You have missed eighteen cleanings. Cleaning is simple, provided you've mastered the machine's seventy-two-step process, seven of which have three steps in and of themselves.

Please note that these instructions may change at any time without warning. Your machine will not let you know, but if you screw up, it will turn off and never work again. Also, it will leak, but don't worry, you cannot fix it since there is no way to open it. Usually, it is just one simple plastic tube that clogs. Don't bother calling or emailing the store where you bought it. They won't help. You have to send the machine to Italy. You won't receive a replacement machine. We are sorry. This is how we roll at SMEG.

Enjoy.

All I wanted was an easy-to-operate coffee machine for whole coffee beans. Simple buttons, simple instructions, simple cleaning functions. Why is this so difficult?

Till Death Do Us Part

A couple of days ago, I watched Ghost with Demi Moore and Patrick Swayze, one of my all-time favorite movies. (Crying every.single.time) So, what happens when we die, Mom?" my son asked after the movie. "Is there such a thing as heaven and hell?" Well, is there? It is at least a nice thought to think of being up there "in heaven" and meeting all your family and friends again, right?

With fall approaching fast, and everything turns dark and grey, questions of death and dying are naturally creeping up.

After my son went to bed, I let my thoughts wander, and out of the blue, I remembered something a friend had once said: "I'm not scared of death because after death you can't feel anything. You just aren't there." But that, to me, is the scary part. Where are you? Just nowhere? Just nothing? Is it over? Suddenly I felt like I was standing over a precipice. On a regular fall day, for no reason in particular, my mind had wrapped itself around death for the first time, and I momentarily felt weird.

Have you felt this way? I've recently realized that death will also happen to me. Maybe not today, maybe not next month, but it WILL happen. Before, I knew it would "happen to me," like I knew I would "die someday," but not REALLY. Not actually.

In my thirties, there were so many things "in front" of death. Having my son, moving to Canada, to New York, to Vienna… Subconsciously, I figured, those things had

to happen before I died. I wasn't next up. I didn't have to worry about it right now. It was so far away, surely.

But Nina Riggs's memoir, The Bright Hour, about her struggle with cancer, published posthumously, began to puncture my cool-headedness. I immediately related to her: her inner monologue felt so similar to mine; she was a writer and a worrier, too. It felt like I was reading a book about myself.

The fear of flying often kicks in around age 27, studies reveal, when people start to grapple with their own mortality. They don't feel invincible, like they did as rowdy kids and hormonal teenagers. I totally get that, don't you? "As life experiences build up, the reality of our own vulnerability as human beings can set in," says New York-based therapist Nathan Feiles.

And what about your later years? They say you should listen to life advice from people in their 80s and 90s, because they've been staring death in the face for years. That was one thing my grandfather used to say that has always stuck with me.

When I was in school, 14 and miserable, I was visiting my grandparents. Over coffee and cake, I mused, "I just have to get through the last three months of the school year; I wish I could just wake up and it would be over." Opa jerked back, as if I had hit him. "Never wish away your life," he told me, quietly. I struggled to see what he meant — of course anyone would want to skip days that were difficult or painful or heartbreaking. But now that

I'm older, I'm starting to grasp his point. Soak it all up, even the hard parts. You are alive.

So, how can we move forward without freaking out about death? A friend recommended the book *Staring at the Sun* by Irvin Yalom about dealing with death anxiety. "It helps," she said.

Or what if we reframe things so that we see life, instead of death, as the mind-bending part? Barbara Ehrenreich writes in *Natural Cause*: "You can think of death bitterly or with resignation, as a tragic interruption of your life, and take every possible measure to postpone it. Or, more realistically, you can think of life as an interruption of an eternity of personal nonexistence and see it as a brief opportunity to observe and interact with the living, ever-surprising world around us."

Now and again, I'll be looking at my child, and it will cross my mind that we're all going to die someday – and then I'll think of things like earrings, and they seem so ridiculous. Who cares??? We are going to die; why are we wearing earrings? But then maybe that's the point of jewelry? And sports? And songs? And complicated soup recipes? To be distractingly wonderful and fill up the moments and let you just play with your child on the rug?

Our close relationships ground us, too, of course. After years of living with stage IV cancer, Kate Bowler wrote in The New York Times: "A friend knits me socks and another drops off cookies, and still another writes a funny email or takes me to a concert. These seemingly

small efforts are anchors that hold me to the present, that keep me from floating away on thoughts of an unknown future. They say to me, as my sister Maria did on one very bad day: ‘Yes, the world is changed, dear heart, but do not be afraid. You are loved, you are loved. You will not disappear. I am here.’”

Because at the end of the day: “We are all just walking each other home.” – Ram Dass

Artificial Intelligence Cannot

Yesterday evening I attended a lecture on AI, and I have to say that many things I heard are a bit scary. For example, AI can write an entire novel within 20 seconds. All I need to do is type, for example, Stephen King-style, 90,000 words, keywords: woods, scary, friendship, death, and monster. I will receive a full manuscript of a novel that, 20 pages in, sounds amazing. Makes me wonder: will we need authors in the future? Will we need humans in stores, or can robots do the job? They are sort of doing it already anyway. Some strange future we are heading to, don't you think? It obviously has many good sides as well. Maybe it can assist in finding a cure for Aids or cancer. However, for now, there are still things artificial intelligence cannot do, which puts humans still in charge. For now.

Experience a heart attack while working in the herb garden.

Get a divorce.

Put too many kernels in the pan to make popcorn because I wanted MORE popcorn, and then I got LESS because half of them fell out! #irony #metaphor

Wonder what its middle school bully is doing now.

Show up to court in a white linen suit.

Drape myself face down on an ottoman in a fit of ennui.

Adjourn to the reading room for tea and cookies.

Yawn, flick the middle finger, or kiss.

Suspect that something evil has happened in this very room.

Fall for a red-flag person.

Lose its sense of time in *The New York Times* and miss one's flight.

Have a least-favorite roommate.

Admire the voluptuous nature of a cloud.

Climax in unison with its lover.

Obtain a meditative state and lose it.

Extend a too-firm handshake to someone you don't like.

Swiftly transition from self-loathing to acceptance at the sight of its dead and wrongly planted fig plant.

Rid itself of the feeling that a yoga retreat is a scam.

Chug a Tequila Sunrise Cocktail in front of everyone.

Become shy about seeing two people sexually, tongue kissing.

Give it all up for someone.

Continue feeling shame for something it did in fourth grade.

Weep over sins that are not its own.

Tokyo Drift a shopping cart around the grocery store.

Clean effectively.

Fight back movie-induced tears.

Surrender to the currents of the great unknown through the steady brown eyes of someone special.

Ride a desert horse atop the high isolated hills, leaving behind a red cloud of dust and a dark past.

Avoid eye contact with the one person who you know who knows the answer.

Pace.

Flail.

Sashay.

Understand and respect pure charisma.

Reassess its sexuality after watching a video of a rug being steam cleaned.

Learn more about itself through the years with a partner.

Appreciate a well-tailored suit.

Lean against an office windowsill that overlooks the city skyline and wonder what it's all for.

Wake up in a driveway.

Multitask.

Make moral judgements.

Feel.

Forget the names of everyone who works with you.

Worry that the friend group they are meant to have is somewhere else.

Employ a diet that is maintained through persistent self-hate.

Suffer from seasonal unease.

Succumb to an ice-cream bar.