

YOU

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Be alert.

This story is about you.

Don't think you're "just reading a story." Even if that's what you usually do. Don't be *safe* on the sidelines.

Throughout your days, is that how you feel? *Safe*?

The distance that you keep between you and the world around you, that distance equals the distance that you keep between you and... you. (Do you feel *safe*?) Your disconnection has always, always made it easy to dodge the bullets, which is why you've never been... hurt. Right? The disconnection. The disconnection has kept you safe. From the bullets. From the pain. But this time? Just while you're reading this story? Don't dodge the bullets.

Don't dodge anything.

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Think of how far we've already come—we've already uncovered a hidden part of you for you to see, if you're willing. Look at the part of you that we've uncovered: until now, you've read less to immerse yourself in a good story than to hide from your own story.

That matters. Looking at that, knowing that, matters.

Because until you look at that, until you know that, you can never be free, can never free yourself from the basic conditions.

You.

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Few authors take the risk of external references—references to the world outside of their stories from within their stories—but with you, I want that risk. Because you matter

to me. So this story is *only* external references, is only risk. But here, now, before reading on, please consider this external reference: you're reading too fast. Slow down. If you don't have time to read slowly, stop reading. Go take care of what you need to take care of so that you have time to read slowly.

If not reading *YOU* right this minute means that you'll never read *YOU*, that's okay. Take care of what you need to take care of. But. If you're still reading? Then slow down.

Consider this: there is one thing in your life that matters more than anything else. There is one thing in your life that you most need to take care of.

You.

!!!

Life's Three Basic Conditions: You are angry. You are afraid. You are depressed.

Don't let The Three Basic Conditions slide out of mind while you read on to the next paragraph—*fee!* The Three Basic Conditions.

You, lovely reader, own The Three Basic Conditions. Admit it or not.

Hey! You are angry. *Hey!* You are afraid. *Hey!* You are depressed.

Does that annoy you? Does connecting The Three Basic Conditions to you, annoy you?

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Another question. Did the title of this story interest you?

Please, please, please. Think about your reaction to the question "Did the title of this story interest you?"

(Or, lovely reader, don't think about it. Instead, just read on.)

Did the title interest you? That is, can you admit that *you* are interested in *YOU*? That a story entitled *YOU* should interest you?

Tough to admit?

Easy to hide from. No one will force you to decelerate and think. No one will force you to decelerate and feel. You can do now what you've always done: you can glide over the words. This time, merely gliding over the words might be safer. So glide. Read fast. Get this over with. Because you have Other Things To Do. More important things. Than focusing on you.

Glide. That might be safest.

Or... if you rouse yourself enough to start over—to reread *YOU* from the beginning—there will be a happy ending.

Ending one: a happy ending.

If you don't? If you stay as lulled, as disconnected as you've learned is safest, and continue reading as though I'm not writing to you? There will be no happy ending. That is certain.

Ending two: an ending that you can expect, is the ending that you will reach.

Which will it be? Will you reread *YOU* from the beginning?

Either way, the board is set; so let's play.

It's your story but, if you must, pretend it isn't.

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Basic Condition One: you are angry. Sometimes you admit to your constant anger, sometimes not, but unlike anger in the rest of the world, *your* anger is forbidden, isn't it. Your anger is a secret so you can never accept it as your basic condition.

Same for Basic Condition Two: you are afraid. You never accept fear as your basic condition. Your fear too is unmentionable. Never mention it to your family, to your friends. They have their own fear, their equally unmentionable fear, to conceal.

But oh, Basic Condition Three: you are depressed. Your depression really wallops you. Your depression wallops you because of what you *know*: good people deserve to be happy. If you're not happy, then you're not a good person.

Right?

Turn that around. You are not a good person *therefore* you're depressed.

Someone else—someone who you don't know, someone you will never meet—is a good person. *Therefore* he-is-happy/she-is-happy. Because he and she know The Secret.

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When did it start? When did your life begin to wither? When did it become so limited that your life could so snugly fit under The Three Basic Conditions? Those are terrible possessions: when your life began to wither and how it began to wither.

It happened while you were a little kid. A little kid, and your parents were beating the crap out of you. Your life shrank to what it is today, founded in anger fear and depression, way back when you were a little kid and your parents were beating you.

You don't remember that? You don't believe that they were beating the crap out of you? Your parents *were* beating you—maybe beating you with their smiles and their laughter and their encouragement—but they were beating you.

They were your parents and they loved you, so why were they beating you? And why did they need to beat you so unceasingly with that most hurtful of weapons? With their love?

Those are two tough phrases to put together, huh. To put together “beating the crap out of you” and their doing so with “smiles and laughter and encouragement.” But the question requires both phrases.

Here is the answer that you already know: your parents believed that what they were doing was what they were supposed to do. What was expected. They told themselves that they “didn't know any better.” That they “didn't understand.”

Nothing they did should cause you to hate them. Nothing they did should cause you to be angry at them. They were back then, exactly as you are now. You are doing what you're supposed to do. You don't know any better. You are not understanding. Which is why *now* can be so important.

Now.

You, right now, get the choice of whether you will willingly understand.

But I've lost you, right? Either you don't know what I'm talking about or you refuse to know what I'm talking about, so let's imagine that this story is now a time machine, and let's jump into it and go back in time. Let's go back to jog your memory. Let's go back in time and watch you at one of the many moments during your conversion.

...Whoa! Stop the time machine! Here's a good day to remember. There you are at—what age are you, three years old? Four years old? Look at you. You're standing in line with your mom and dad, standing next to a Christmas tree. You can hear music playing—is that *Jingle Bells*? And there! Look! It's Santa! You're standing in line to visit Santa! Remember that day?

That's you, all wide-eyed and happy.

At the age of three you couldn't remember the prior Christmas season, so mommy and daddy are telling you that you visited Santa last year—photos of your visit are even in the family album!—and you loved Santa last year, and it was so much fun, and this year daddy will take more photos to show to you next year, and mommy will stay right with you and, wow!

Aren't you excited! Mommy tells you that you're going to sit on Santa Claus's lap and tell him what you want for Christmas, and you can see that Santa is an old fat guy in a red suit, a guy with a phony white beard and an unfathomable laugh that doesn't sound remotely like any laugh you have ever heard. This *ho-ho-ho* thing is too strange and—

Speaking of strange, why is mommy telling you that Santa will bring you gifts? You know that Santa never brings you anything. You're only a little kid but you're sorta creeped out by mommy's story of Santa breaking into your house while everybody is asleep, even if he's breaking in to leave stuff, not to take it. Creepy.

Remember now, as you read this, who you were back then. Back when you were three years old. You already had your three-year-old-kid conception of reality based on your experience to-date, and you knew that gifts came from your family, not from a stranger in a fake beard.

But here you are. In line to see Santa.

Getting closer.

Mommy encouraging you.

Closer.

Tension is building because you *know* that this Santa guy isn't authentic, not according to your little-kid Truth, and you *know* that something is wrong. Something is

wrong that you can't put your finger on (because you're only a little kid, doing what mommy and daddy tell you to do); and you want to tell mommy that you're afraid and that you know that something is wrong, but you're too young to have the necessary words, too young to tell anybody that you know what The Truth is and that this Santa phony has nothing to do with Truth. Tension is still mounting and daddy is still snapping pictures and you're still moving forward and mommy is still smiling, but you can't work out what they expect of you, just what you expect of yourself. You have the inner, wordless motivation toward honesty that feels like your only lifeline, like something sacred that the situation is stretching tight, something you want to hold on to—

And then, you're next. Next to sit on Santa's lap.

You're grabbed and tossed onto his lap like some plaything or like some unthinking lump, and—surprise—you cry! You try to get away from Santa; you try to get down. You *need* to get down, but mommy's there and daddy's got that camera and they figure maybe, just maybe, you'll calm down and they'll still get the good photos for the family album, that they'll get some shots to show to you next year. But you're crying louder and you're fighting to get away, and Santa's got his hands on you and he's gently tugging you back onto his lap with a ho-ho-ho—

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And now you're screaming.

Terror.

Daddy finally lowers his damned camera. Mommy grabs you and comforts you. *But she's stiff*. Holds you tight. *But she's distant*. The tension is still there and you don't know the words to ask but you ask anyway with your tears and with your grip on mommy and with your eyes pleading for daddy—and all the strangers are smiling, and there's laughter and peppy music and everybody's cooing at the cute little kid who just went ballistic, the darling little kid who just failed the finals.

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Our time machine—the story of you—travels both ways. You are in The Moment. If you are willing, you are reading about you.

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Could you see *you* back then, even briefly, on that day with Santa?

As was Santa, the story of *YOU* is a test. Can you see your childhood? Do you understand (just a little) that the modern world has prepared you to live in the modern world?

You were born in truth. Truth was all you knew. All the lies? They came from outside of you. The lies began to attack you soon after your birth. The modern world had to teach you the lies. As it did with the Santa lie. The modern world did this as a kindness. As a gently imposed blindness. The modern world had to beat down your truth by any means necessary in order to prepare you for living in what the modern world has become. The modern world, while you were small, decades before you could

fight back, buried your innocence, your truth, using the cruelest, most modern means available: kindness and blindness and necessity.

Kindness and blindness. A single coin-of-the-realm with two sides. The modern world requires that you never revitalize your own innocence—not even now, lovely reader. Not even now as you read *YOU*, connected or disconnected.

Necessity.

How could the modern world linger if people like you started rebirthing your Truth?
If you and I and others once again started believing?

!!!

Have I confused you with the wrong particulars? Have I crossed an “I” when I should have dotted a “T?” Did using Santa as my example give you room enough to tell yourself that *YOU* isn’t tailored to you?

Maybe.

But my errors don't matter.

Can you see beyond my failures and look at your potential rebirth? In this moment as you read, my errors can't matter. What matters is that you must see your own childhood for what it was, not for what you've previously believed it to be. If not—and yeah, you should have guessed this—if you can't see your own childhood, if you can't see *you*—then that other ending is coming up. Ending two. The ending that you can expect. It is about to be the ending that you will get.

Because if you aren't revealed in *YOU*, you're still that little kid. You're still waiting to get up on Santa's lap. Still waiting for a total stranger to break into your home (into your life) and leave gifts. Even right now.

And yet...

Lovely reader: I bring you gifts.

Can you let me be your Santa?

I want to give you back to yourself. I want you to move on from here toward a happy ending. If not now? Then there's always next year, just as when your parents took you to see Santa. Back then you held to your honesty and thereby failed society's Big One. You disappointed your confused, groping parents, but they knew that there was always next year, and the next, and the next... Until you broke. Until society hid you from yourself. Until the day when you told your parents that Santa is swell, that Santa is fun. Until you *believed* in Santa.

Between Christmas visits to Santa your parents had a whole year to prepare you.

The modern world's best weapons are parents who don't know they are weapons. Parents. Weapons. Those who beat the crap out of you with their smiles and their laughter and their encouragement.

Angry. Afraid. Depressed.

Basic Conditions, one, two, three.

!!!

The story of *YOU*.

Is it hard to understand?

How much work would it take to fix the break, the break between who we are born to be and who we have become?

Jesus said: You must be born again.

Buddha said: Rebirth is the only way to The Truth.

Krishna said: You and I have led many lives, but only I know it.

Go back to the beginning. Start over.

Go back to the beginning of the story of *YOU*.

Find your self. You are here. You know that.

As you are worth my effort, you are worth your effort.

!!!

Part of the problem is the binary thinking that controls us, is our either/or mentality. Binary thinking creates opposites. But there are no opposites. (The opposite of happy is sad? The opposite of brave is afraid? Give me a break!) The perception of opposites is only a construct, a tool, an idea that helps us think. So think. Opposites are not real. There is no opposite of a tree, no opposite of dirt, no opposite of you or of sky or of bread or of purpose.

There is no opposite of happy.

Depression is another facet of feeling. Depression is not the opposite of happiness. Depression exists independently. That matters. Understanding that depression exists independently from happiness, matters. Freedom only exists beyond the opposites. There is no either/or.

Getting that—understanding the independence and resultant overlapping of my feelings, of my everything—was a big step for me.

Can My Big Step help you? Can it be a Little Step for you?

We are in this together; you as you read, me as I write. Reader-writer. *You are not alone*. Recognizing that there are two of us leads inevitably to accepting that there are others. Can you feel them? Can you feel the hope of that promise?

You don't have to be alone: aloneness is just another choice.

!!!

When I asked you near the beginning to rouse yourself, to go back to the beginning and start reading with the integrity of your own immutable honesty, did you? Did you accept my offered contract? Did you reread at least those first two words?

Be alert.

If instead you kept reading, if you failed to start over—if you still fail to start over—then this won't have that happy ending. Ending one.

!!!

There will always be next year for a chance to visit Santa, right? Jesus. Buddha. Krishna. All of them are with you. While you are reading the story of *YOU*. And they'll remain with you while you debate whether you'll live your own story.

You still have a chance. You can go back to the beginning *right now* and start over. This story is about you, and in your story only you can choose to fail. Only you can choose how the story of *YOU* will end. Ending one. Ending two.

Come on, now that you know that I want you to succeed, will you try?

How can I help you see that there is no safety net and that you are *right now* on a tightrope, ready to fall?

How can I help you fall?

How can I help you know that, when you fall, you will be okay?

!!!

I fell. You should know that. I was kicking and screaming, trying my hardest to stay on the tightrope. But I fell. The “opposites” thing. That’s what led to my fall.

If you’ve read what I’ve written, then you know that I’m climbing back up on that tightrope, right here, right now, to be with you—and you know that I’ve already fallen. I went down without a net. And I’m okay.

You can fall too. You can fall from the rope that connects where you were to where you are going. You won't die.

Instead you will reconnect with a little more of who you were born to be.

Can that be bad? Can it be bad to fall from the tightrope of How We Live Our Modern Lives? Can it be worse to rediscover your own truth than to live the modern lie?

!!!

Are you still unsure?

Then think about the future. Take three minutes to think about any version of the future that comes to mind.

Within the version of the future that you choose, think about your children.

(*Why* were your parents beating you with their love? Have you found enough of an answer?)

Asked earlier: *Do you feel safe?* Whatever your answer is, can you accept it continuing to be your answer? And as a First Consequence: is it okay to be unhappy?

If these questions seem pale, then for a moment live in your future: evaluate the question: *Do you feel safe?* Whatever your answer, can you accept it continuing to be your answer?

To make all the questions less pale: ask these questions, not only for your own sake but as well for the sake of your children. Your own Part Two.

When your children reach your age will they feel safe?

You grow up, you have kids, you “raise” your kids—and one day you take them to sit on Santa’s lap. Final exam.

Only that won’t be *your* finals. Your finals come when you revive enough to know that I’m writing this to *you*, when you accept that *you* are the only one reading this, that you are the only one here who can make a choice. Do you continue hiding under the modern world? And if you do, can you be happy with your choice?

If not, *why is it okay for you to be afraid? Angry? Depressed?*

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Afraid. Angry. Depressed.

The Three Basic Conditions, lovely reader. They apply to everyone you’ve ever met. Including you. Me. But. No one else can force you to continue living only within them.

Oh. And here’s the insider-scoop on The Secret I mentioned earlier. Those other people who are happy because they are good people, while you are not a good person? They don’t exist. That’s The Secret. All the smiles that surround you: look at them closely. Look at the photos of all the happy people who are in magazines and on the web. The people who are smiling *because* they are happy. Look at their smiles. They don’t expect you to study their photos; they expect you to be like them, to glide. That way they and you can live in the shadow of The Secret.

Or grab your TV remote and hit pause. Study the TV people’s faces. On pause, they can’t hide The Truth that *you* hid within your heart during those year-long interludes between Santa visits. Pause. Study the TV people’s smiles. Be alert.

Do you see The Secret?

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This is the end. This is one of the two endings I wrote about earlier. Ending one. Ending two. You chose how you got here.

The funny thing is that this tiny story can be the biggest story that you will ever read. Because it is your story. And *you* get to pick your own ending.

So.

Here goes.

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Choose.

Thank you for reading *YOU*. If you are intrigued by the story and believe other readers might enjoy it too, please share with your family and friends where to find it: **seedingDandelion.com**.

A Ghost Refused, the first book I'm releasing, will be available on Amazon April 1st. If you email me at fsFoster@seedingDandelion.com, I'll send you a free copy in exchange for an Amazon review when I release the book—and add you to my mailing list, if you wish. I will occasionally release more free short stories that you might like, so get on my eMail list if you want to read them. I'll seldom eMail you, but I plan to publish ten books over the next year(?), as well as add other interesting content. For starters, check my blog.

By the way, unlike any other ghost story, *A Ghost Refused* will challenge bits of your worldview. **My job is to tell outrageously entertaining stories while draining a few gallons from “the pond of what everybodyKnows.”**