

Caught Graduating

Hello.

Thanks for spending a little time with these workbooks.

They aren't races.

They're walks.

Some people move through one in an afternoon.

Others take their time over days or weeks.

Either is just fine.

I won't ask you to agree with everything here.

I won't ask you to finish every page.

I won't ask you to do every exercise.

I'll simply invite you to notice a few ordinary moments as you go.

If something stays with you, wonderful.

If nothing does, that's okay too.

Thank you for taking the walk anyway.

I'm glad you're here.

— *Frank*

Caught

Graduating

A Workbook

By

Frank Wood



A CAUGHT SOONER BOOK

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This book was written to be shared in spirit. Please feel free to recommend it, lend it, or give it to someone who may find it useful.

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For more information, visit
caughtsooner.com

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Welcome

Yes, this is a workbook.

Eight lessons.

Some short stories. A few small questions along the way.

Nothing here is going to transform you.

Not the goal.

The goal is smaller.

To notice the thing a little sooner than you might have.

That's it.

And — worth saying.

This workbook works with you. Not on you.

Some part of you brings the willingness to look.

The lessons meet that part.

Where the willingness goes, the work goes.

That part is yours.

It does ask something of you.

A little focus.

Not a lot.

Enough to be in the room while you're reading.

If this is your first Caught book — welcome.

Different door. Same you.

If you've been to another one of these — welcome back.

Different room. Same porch.

This workbook will explore something that may already be operating in you.

A line, a look, a move, a version of you that arrives before you've quite chosen it.

Lesson 1 will both name the workbook's focus and offer you an anchor
— a way of helping visualize the book's focus.

The pace is yours.

Take what you take.

Come in.

A Note to start the workbook

Graduate

I have so many memories from the years we shared the hallways over the past weeks, months, years.

This workbook offers me a way to say, “you made a difference, you matter.”

Wherever your tomorrows take you, be well!

Mr. Smiles

(You’ll meet me later in the workbook)

A note from you (for teacher, administrator, youth director, parent)

A Note from David

Hello.

I'm glad you're here.

You can call me David.

You'll find me throughout the Caught workbooks, audio lessons, and other conversations that live around this work.

Over the next few lessons, I'll be walking alongside you through this workbook.

Whether you're sitting with a coffee, taking a walk, riding a train, or spending a few quiet minutes in your favorite chair, think of these pages less as a class and more as a conversation.

As you read, you may notice stories, questions, and small moments to reflect on. There are no grades here. No right pace. No finish line.

Just ideas to sit with.

If it helps, imagine me as a workbook companion. A friendly voice
beside you on a porch, a park bench, or a walk around the
neighborhood.

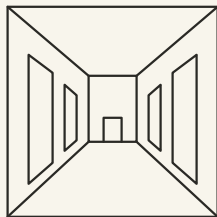
Take what helps.

Leave what doesn't.

And take your time.

I'm glad you're here.

— *David*



LESSON 1

Graduating is a word

Graduating also lives in the rooms you are leaving, and some of the people who shared those rooms with you.

This one's for someone who happened to be around, a person you walked past, a person who may have walked past you, a person who you saw and a person who saw you.

A coach.

A teacher.

A counselor.

Sometimes the person at the front desk.

Someone who was there.

Not every day.

Not every moment.

But enough.

Enough to see the moments.

Enough to see things that won't make most yearbook goodbyes — especially from the random people who quietly witnessed your journey.

And here's the turn, before we go any further.

You were once that student.

Somebody was around for you.

Saw your moments.

Saw things you didn't know were being seen.

You may not remember all of them.

You may not remember any of them.

But somebody was there.

Hold that.

We'll come back to it.

Glad you found this.

One small thing, before the stories.

Here's what this book is going to be about.

Not a big announcement. Just so you know the shape of it.

A moment lands. A good one or a hard one. And you stay there.

You linger.

The good one, you replay. The hard one, you can't put down.

And while you're lingering on the one moment — today is going on around you.

The Monday you're actually standing in.

And you're not quite in it, because you're back there, in the moment that already happened.

That's the whole focus. *The lingering. And what the lingering costs.*

We'll come back to it. Let it sit.

STORIES.

Two small moments before we go further.

No hurry.

The first hallway.

There's a friend who tells it like this.

Sophomore year.

Between third and fourth period.

The hallway packed, everybody moving, that shuffle of a few hundred students trying to get somewhere before the bell.

A freshman dropped a binder.

Papers everywhere.

The kind of thing the hallway just steps around.

A senior stopped.

Knelt down.

Began helping to gather the scattered pages while everybody flowed past on both sides.

Said something that made the freshman laugh.

Then stood up, handed the stack over, and kept walking, on to Senior English, I think.

Walked away like it was nothing.

Three freshman cheerleaders saw it, all of it.

Didn't say anything at the time.

They did look at each other.

As freshmen, people don't find words for this kind of thing.

But those cheerleaders, they still remember that day, that hallway, those scattered papers.

Well, at least every now and then.

— *Papers get dropped in hallways.*

That does happen.

The other hallway.

There's a teacher who tells it like this.

Same student.

A year later.

A different hallway, after a test handed back with a number, a 67, on it the student wasn't ready for.

The student didn't say anything.

Well, the student thought something.

The football coach doesn't like 67's.

Later, stood at the locker a beat too long.

Stared at the lock, had it since freshman year.

The teacher, passing, saw the student lost in thought — a place the teacher couldn't follow.

Later the student came by to speak with the teacher.

Said "I don't get it."

Said it quiet, like it cost something.

The teacher didn't fix it.

Just sat with them and went back through it.

Slow.

The student got it.

Eventually.

Not that day.

I hadn't decided to.

— *Grades are given on tests.*

That does happen.

There's not one of us who hasn't seen this or lived this, at least once.
A moment that showed up.
And in that hallway, it's a moment when they were stuck and no one
can see past it.
You've seen a student like that.
Perhaps, you remember a moment like that for you.
Maybe more than one.
Maybe one is walking across a stage in a few weeks.
The friend saw one thing.
The teacher saw another.
Different hallways.
Same student.

Notice where both of those happened.
A hallway.
We all have one.
The one we walked for years, between one thing and the next.
To class. To lunch. To practice. Toward home.
A few hundred of us, moving, every day, past each other.
It was never the place anything was supposed to happen.

It was the place you passed through on the way to where things happened.

But that's where the binder dropped.

That's where the 67 was carried to the locker.

That's where a student stood stuck, and where a student kept walking.

We all have moments. A high one. A low one.

And we all have moments we look past — the ones happening right beside us while we're somewhere else.

The hallway is where both of those live.

The getting stuck. And the looking up.

In this workbook, we'll call it the hallway.

The place you moved through without thinking.

The place you were stuck, and the place you came unstuck.

The place you were seen, and didn't know it.

You'll come to know the hallway as we go.

Here's the part that's easy to miss.

There was someone who saw all of it.

Down the hall, there was a custodian.

We called him Mr. Smiles.

Can't even remember his real name now.

Mr. Smiles is just what stuck.
Been at the school longer than most of the teachers.
Pushed the cart.
Emptied the cans.
Knew which locker jammed and which water fountain ran warm.
Didn't say much.
But watched everything.
Watched the students come through as freshmen, small and loud.
Watched them leave as seniors, taller, quieter, about to be somewhere else.
And there was a line Mr. Smiles said.
Not to everyone.
Just sometimes.
When a student passed by stuck.
When a student passed by lit up.
When a student passed by on an ordinary Monday with nothing happening at all.
Same line, every time.

Give account of yourself.

What does that even mean.

Mr. Smiles never explained it.

Just said it and kept pushing the cart.

It wasn't an accusation.

There was nothing to defend.

But it sat there.

Give account of yourself.

The student heard it walking to class and didn't know what to do with it.

Neither do you, maybe.

That's alright.

It's not a line that wants an answer right away.

In this workbook we'll call the one who was around your witness.

Maybe a custodian.

Maybe a coach.

Maybe you.

The one who happened to be in the hallway.

Who saw the student stuck and saw the student look beyond.

Who carried both without making a speech about either.

CARRY THIS.

That's the beginning.

This week — once — think of one witness you've had.

A person who saw you.

A person who just happened to be around.

Not the whole story.

Just bring their face up.

You'll do more with it soon.

For now, just bring them up.

That's enough.

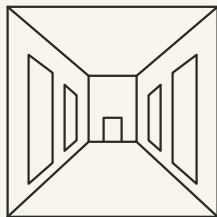
NEXT LESSON.

A glimpse of what's ahead.

Held lightly.

Witnessing.

See you in Lesson 2.



LESSON 2

Witnessing

Last lesson you met Mr. Smiles.

This lesson is about the thing he was doing.

*The thing a lot of people do, in rooms like these,
without ever calling it anything.*

Glad you stayed.

STORIES.

Two moments before we go further.

No hurry.

The game.

Friday night.

The whole place out under the lights.

Look around a high school football game and you'll see it everywhere, if you look.

A father in the stands watching his son on the field — and seeing, for a second, the four-year-old that son used to be.

A coach watching a player finally do the thing right, saying nothing, just nodding.

A teacher in the bleachers seeing a student out of the classroom for the first time — louder, looser, more themselves.

Students watching students.

Who's with who.

Who showed up.

Who didn't.

Nobody calls it anything.

But the whole night, a few thousand people are seeing each other.

The night was crisp. Some called it cold. The fans called it football weather.

*In one hallway, three floor tiles had been replaced. New tiles. Different color.
Different shine.*

Nobody came to see the tiles.

Nobody came to remember the weather.

Yet years later, somebody will.

— Half of them won't remember the score.

*— All of them saw somebody. They also saw the school. The night. The
hallway. And in some hallways, new tiles.*

The assembly.

Monday.

The whole school folded into the gym.

Bleachers full.

That low roar before it starts.

Same thing, different room.

*A teacher scanning her row, doing the count without thinking, knowing
which seat is empty and why.*

*A principal at the microphone seeing the whole school at once and somehow
also seeing the one kid in the third row who's having a hard week.*

Seniors watching the senior at the podium, half proud, half ready to be done.

*A new student three weeks in, watching everyone else, trying to read the
place.*

Getting read right back.

Witnessing, everywhere, all at once.

Ordinary as the bleachers.

— Nobody signed up for it.

— Everybody was doing it.

Most of what gets witnessed never gets said.

That's just how it works.

*We see each other constantly — at the game, in the gym, down the hall —
and most of it passes without a word.*

A look.

A nod.

A thing noticed and carried and never mentioned.

You've witnessed people that way.

You've been witnessed that way.

More than you know.

There's witnessing happening right now.

Even here.

Even reading this.

Now.

Back to Mr. Smiles.

Everything the game does on a Friday night, and the assembly does on a Monday — all that seeing, all at once — Mr. Smiles did quietly, in the hallway, every ordinary day.

He didn't have a stadium.

Didn't have a stage.

Just the hall, and the cart, and the years.

But he was doing the same thing all those people in the bleachers were doing.

Seeing.

Students becoming themselves, one locker, one bell, one passing period at a time.

The witnessing the whole school did at the big moments, Mr. Smiles witnessed too.

At the small ones.

All of them.

For decades.

That was the job underneath the job.

When a student passed by stuck, he saw it.

When one passed by lit up, he saw it.

When one passed by on a Monday with nothing happening at all, he saw that too.

And he'd say the line.

Give account of yourself.

Still no explanation.

Still just the cart, rolling on down the hall.

That's the witness.

That's your witness.

THE WITNESS — A CLOSER LOOK.

Some questions. If you'd like.

A specific event — not in general.

1.

Bring back a time people were watching. Or could have been.

A field under the lights. The back row at an assembly. A hallway the
afternoon something happened. A stage you crossed once.

Just the moment.

Just a word or two.

2.

Now — who else was there?

Probably more than you noticed at the time. A parent in the stands. A teacher at the edge. Someone you weren't thinking about.

That was the room.

Who else.

3.

Now — picture what they saw. Not what you performed.

Probably something quieter. A look that crossed your face. The way you carried yourself between the moments.

That was what they kept.

4.

As you look at Q1-3, anything surprise you?

Anything jump out?

Anything that jumped.

You named the event.

You named the others.

You named what your witness saw.

You named what surprised you.

More than you knew. By more than you knew.

CARRY THIS.

This week — once — think of a room where you witnessed somebody.

A game.

A gym.

A hallway.

You saw someone.

You may never have said so.

Just bring that moment up.

That's enough.

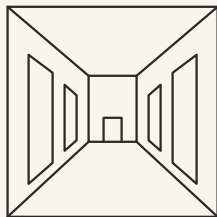
NEXT LESSON.

A glimpse of what's ahead.

Held lightly.

The stuck.

See you in Lesson 3.



LESSON 3

There are moments

Last lesson was about witnessing. This one is about what gets witnessed.

Glad you stayed.

The assignment.

Junior English.

Read a section. Answer ten questions.

Only ten — not thirty or fifty. Ten.

Easy enough.

That afternoon the student sat down, read the assignment, answered all ten questions, and moved on with life.

Met up with friends later.

Mentioned the assignment.

Easy one. Already done. No big deal.

Next day.

English class.

Papers out.

Teacher starts talking.

A few sentences in, something doesn't sound right.

The assignment wasn't the odd-numbered questions.

The assignment was the even-numbered questions.

The student had answered every wrong question.

Not one. All ten.

Funny thing about moments like that.

The mind gets there, and the body answers.

Heat in the face.

Eyes drop. They find the desk, the floor — anything but a pair of eyes looking back.

The body doing what a body does when it wants to not be seen for a second.

Class ended.

Students headed for the hallway.

Some laughing. Some talking about lunch. Some already onto the next thing.

The student wasn't onto the next thing.

Still carrying it.

Down the hall.

The same friends from the night before. Right there. In the same hallway.

Some of them in the same class, even. They'd just watched the whole thing.

And Mr. Smiles. Standing there. Looking.

Was it at me? Today?

The student passed right by.

No eye contact.

Face still red.

Just keep walking.

A lot of people know that feeling.

Not this exact story.

A version of it.

The presentation slide that wasn't ready.

The email sent to the wrong person.

The meeting that went sideways.

The moment that suddenly felt much bigger than it probably was.

The moment was real.

The heat was real.

The carrying was real.

The witness knew that too.

The witness just knew it wasn't the whole account.

THE MISS — A CLOSER LOOK.

Some questions. If you'd like.

A specific moment — not in general.

1.

Bring back a time you missed the assignment. Or misread what was being asked.

The instruction was right there. You just took it in wrong.

Not in general. One specific time.

2.

Stay with the moment it landed.

When you found out. The half-second your mind knew and your body answered.

What did it do — the face, the stomach, the eyes?

3.

Now the walk after.

You carried it somewhere. Down a hall. Out a door. Past people.

Where did you take it. And who did you pass without looking at.

4.

The moment was real. The heat was real.

But it wasn't the whole account.

Someone may have seen more than the miss. They usually do.

What might they have seen, that you were too red-faced to look up
and notice?

CARRY THIS.

This week — once — let one of those moments come back.

The wrong ten questions. Whatever yours was.

Don't fix it. Don't explain it. It's long done.

Just notice it was a moment. One dot.

Not the map.

You walked it.

People saw you.

You didn't notice most of it.

The years passed.

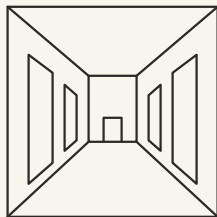
You're about to walk out.

Some of what was seen is still in the hallway.

NEXT LESSON.

The ones who saw it.

See you in Lesson 4.



LESSON 4

There are witnesses

Last lesson was about moments.

This one is about the people who saw more than the moment.

Glad you stayed.

STORIES.

Two more.

No hurry.

The yearbook.

Somebody had to make the yearbook.

A handful of students, a room, a deadline.

Going around all year getting stories on the class.

Who did what.

What happened.

Which photo.

Which quote.

What gets a whole page and what gets a corner.

They were the ones deciding what the class would remember.

And they argued about it.

Kindly, mostly.

One wanted the game on the cover.

One wanted the mural the art kids painted.

One kept pushing for a picture of the lunchroom on the Monday morning before Friday's homecoming game, and couldn't quite say why, and got outvoted.

They saw each other in it, too.

Saw who noticed the quiet stuff.

Saw who only wanted the big stuff.

Saw, working late in that room, what each of them thought was worth keeping.

The book came out.

Homecoming got two pages.

Monday morning didn't make it.

Here's the thing nobody said out loud.

The yearbook keeps the catch.

It does not keep the Tuesday.

There's only so much room.

The loud moments make the book.

The ordinary ones — the ones that were most of the year — don't fit.

The staff knew it.

They were almost an important part of it all.

— *Somebody decided what got kept.*

— *Somebody always does.*

The drill.

Every team has the drill.

The one nobody can do.

The one where the whole practice grinds to a stop.

You line up, you try it, you blow it, you go to the back of the line and watch the next person blow it too.

Nobody knows why it's so hard.

It just is.

And here's what you find out, standing in that line.

It's hard for almost everybody.

The kid you figured had it all together — blows it.

The one who never struggles — struggles.

The star — back of the line, same as you.

You stand there watching, and something loosens.
You thought it was just you.
It was never just you.
The coach saw it.
Saw the whole team hit the same wall and stay in line anyway.
That's the thing a coach actually watches for.
Not who's good at the easy stuff.
Who keeps lining up for the hard stuff.
Nobody filmed the drill.
There's no photo of it.
It didn't make the yearbook.
But it might be the truest thing the team did all year.
And somebody saw it.

— *I thought it was just me.*

— *It was never just me.*

That's what a witness does.

A witness sees more than the moment.

The moment is one frame.

The witness saw the reel — the deciding, the struggling, the lining up
again, the ordinary hours nobody photographs.

You had witnesses.

More than you know.

People who saw the parts that didn't make the book.

The parts you didn't keep.

The parts you maybe never knew were seen at all.

Down the hall, the cart rolled by the gym while the team ran the drill.

Mr. Smiles glanced in.

Watched a minute.

Said it to nobody in particular.

Give account of yourself.

Then kept moving.

Still no explanation.

Still just the cart.

You walked it.

People saw you.

You didn't notice most of it.

The years passed.

THE WITNESSES — A CLOSER LOOK.

Some questions. If you'd like.

A specific group — not in general.

1.

Bring back a group you were part of.

A team that ran the same drills. A crew you closed up with. A class that met every day at the same hour, in the same room.

Just the group.

Name the group.

2.

Now — what did they see you do, over and over, that never made any highlight?

And — what did you notice in others?

Probably ordinary things. The trying part. The coming-back part. The small choices nobody photographed.

That was the part that didn't make the book.

Who was in it with you.

3.

Now — what might one of them have seen in you that you didn't keep for yourself?

Something they'd remember that you forgot.

Maybe how you handled a hard day. Maybe a kindness you didn't notice you were doing. Maybe a moment of effort nobody clapped for.

Someone kept it when you didn't.

4.

As you look at Q1-3, anything surprise you?

Anything jump out?

If something surfaced.

You named the group.

You named what they saw and what you noticed.

You named what someone kept that you didn't.

You named what surprised you.

More of you got seen than you kept.

CARRY THIS.

This week — once — think of a group that saw you over time.

Not a moment.

The long ordinary stretch.

Who was in the room.

Just bring them up.

That's enough.

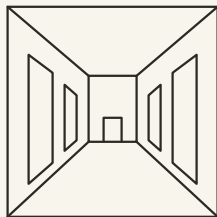
NEXT LESSON.

A glimpse of what's ahead.

Held lightly.

What the witness holds.

See you in Lesson 5.



LESSON 5

The witness held both

Last lesson was about witnesses.

This one is about what a witness holds when they're holding both.

Glad you stayed.

STORIES.

Two students.

Same hallway.

No hurry.

The quiz taker.

I'm an okay student.

I do my homework — most nights anyway.

Not the best, not the worst. Middle of the class probably.

Math is hard sometimes. History is boring sometimes.

Honest — I didn't even study for this quiz. Forgot it was happening today.

...

Pop quiz. Sixth period. Twenty-two questions.

...

An A. Didn't study. WHAT.

Well look at me. State senator.

Lit up. Alone inside the inflation.

The trumpeter.

I was pretty good.

I even liked marching band.

Well yeah no one liked those stupid shoes.

I practiced — most kids don't.

And I actually cleaned my mouthpiece. The night before.

...

And then

...

Me and just packing up the instrument ... BIG FAIL.

Darn it. I'm "that" kid.

Sunk. Alone inside the collapse.

The hallway.

Both students walked to their next class.

One replaying a good moment.

One replaying a hard one.

One looked through the hallway.

One looked at the floor.

The hallway didn't know the difference.

— I've been in that hallway.

— Different story.

Same alone.

Mr. Smiles was cleaning.

Knew the smudges on the trophy case by heart.

Wiping them off, like he did every Tuesday around this time.

He saw the floating one come by.

He saw the sinking one come by.

He saw them not see each other.

He'd seen this hallway do this for thirty years.

Knew the floating one wasn't heading to state senator.

Knew the sinking one wasn't "that"

kid.

*Knew both stories would dissolve by Thursday — replaced by a new pop quiz,
a new forgotten thing, a new story.*

He held both of them.

The one who couldn't believe their luck.

The one who couldn't believe what they'd done.

Same kids, opposite weather.

He didn't pick.

He didn't reassure.

He didn't correct.

He just kept wiping.

Watching both.

Holding both, quietly, the way a witness does.

Said it as the sinking one passed.

Give account of yourself.

Said it again as the floating one passed.

Give account of yourself.

Same line.

Same smile.

Same cart rolling on.

Still no explanation.

That's what a witness does.

A witness sees you when you're too far inside one story to see anything else.

The witness holds the other half for you.

Holds the part you can't get to right now.

When you were floating, somebody held the part of you that was about to forget the mouthpiece.

When you were sinking, somebody held the part of you that had just gotten the A.

Maybe not the same somebody.

Maybe more than one.

You couldn't hold both at the time.

It was like concrete had taken hold.

Somebody was holding both for you, while you walked alone in your weather.

THE BOTH — A CLOSER LOOK.

Some questions. If you'd like.

A specific moment — not in general.

1.

Today — right now — there's probably a high or a low you've already brought into the day.

A moment from a while back that's still running. Still showing up. Still shaping how you're walking through this Tuesday.

Maybe a win you keep returning to. Maybe a loss you can still feel.

Just the one you brought into today.

2.

Now — the place. Where did it happen?

A kitchen at a particular hour. A field you can still smell. A stretch of road you've driven a hundred times since.

That was the place.

Where it happened.

3.

Now — wonder if there was a witness.

Maybe someone saw what was around the high or the low. The walk-up. The after. The Tuesday next to it.

Probably someone at the edges. The one you didn't notice.

If you didn't identify a witness — what might your Mr. Smiles have noticed?

Maybe they held both for you.

4.

As you look at Q1-3, anything surprise you?

Anything jump out?

Anything that stayed with you.

You named the moment you brought into today.

You named the place.

You named the witness — or imagined one.

You named what surprised you.

Someone held the both.

CARRY THIS.

This week — once — notice the moment you start telling yourself a big story about one small thing.

Just notice the story starting.

Somebody's probably holding the other half for you.

They have been all along.

That's enough.

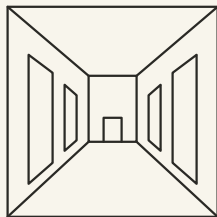
NEXT LESSON.

A glimpse of what's ahead.

Held lightly.

Monday.

See you in Lesson 6.



LESSON 6

Monday

Last lesson was about the witness holding both.

This one is about where most of you actually lived.

Glad you stayed.

STORIES.

One stretch.

No hurry.

Last week.

Friday night, the catch.

Thursday, the 67.

The weekend in between, full of both.

Replaying the catch on the drive home.

Avoiding the test in the bottom of the backpack.

Telling the story to one friend.

Hiding it from another.

Sleeping on it.

Waking up still carrying it.

By Sunday night the body has both — the high humming in the chest, the low pulled tight in the stomach — and neither of them has cleared.

You're going to walk into school Monday morning with last week's weather still inside you.

Monday morning.

Walking in from the parking lot.

There was that little ramp section between the pavement and the sidewalk.

The school sign out front. Some stupid greeting an English teacher wrote.

Through the door.

The school smell.

The mix of students.

Is there a test this week. The deadline on that paper.

Ugh. Ah. The start of a new week.

And yet last week stayed fresh too.

And the walk and the linger all hold the eyes.

The where do I look. And where do I choose to look.

And there — mopping in the hallway like he always was — Mr. Smiles.

He looks up.

Sees you.

Throws the line.

Give account of yourself.

It comes faster than you expected.

Heat on it.

Not a soft thing.

A thrown thing.

And then he's mopping again.

Not waiting for an answer.

Not stopping to see what you do with it.

Already moving the mop in those same long strokes.

You keep walking.

— He's been throwing that pitch every Monday.

— You just kept catching it without knowing it.

Here's the thing about Monday.

Friday was loud.

Thursday was loud.

The catch made noise.

The 67 made noise.

The moments invited you to hold and you did, a little.

Maybe a lot.

Monday is quiet.

Nothing happened yet this week.

The week hasn't decided what to make of you.

You haven't decided what to make of it.

In that quiet — that's when he throws it.

Not at the catch.

Not at the 67.

Not at the noise.

At the quiet.

Because the question — give account of yourself — only really lands on a day when there's nothing big to point to.

At the peak, you could've pointed at the catch.

Look, this is who I am.

At the valley, you could've pointed at the 67.

Look, this is what I am.

Either way the moment answers for you.

You don't have to.

Monday morning, walking in foggy — no moment to use.

No pitch from last week is going to swing for you.

The question is asking who you are when there's no story to tell.

That's the wider account.

The catch isn't the account.

The 67 isn't the account.

The Mondays are.

The walk down the hall.

The held door for someone behind you.

The friend who waved across the cafeteria.

The drill you ran for the hundredth time.

The lunch you ate without thinking about it.

The class you sat through without inflating or collapsing.

The ordinary Tuesday, the ordinary Wednesday, the long unphotographed stretch where most of you actually happened.

Nobody filmed Monday.

Nobody put it in the yearbook.

The catch made the yearbook.

The 67 didn't make it but it took up the same kind of space inside you.

Monday made neither.

And Monday is where you mostly lived.

Mr. Smiles mopped a thousand Mondays.

Threw the line a thousand times.

Most of those students don't remember hearing it.
Some never even registered that he said anything.
He didn't mind.
He kept mopping.
Kept throwing it.
Walked off down the hall and let it sit.
He knew most of them wouldn't catch it that day.
Some of them wouldn't catch it for thirty years.
Some of them, never.
He threw it anyway.
Same line.
Same Monday.
Same cart rolling on.
The man knew something about how lines like that work.
He'd had one thrown at him once, a long time ago, by somebody who walked
away just the same.

A CLOSER LOOK.

Some questions. If you'd like.

A specific moment — not in general.

1.

Bring back a moment when you noticed yourself reflecting on a high or a low moment.

Maybe on the couch. Maybe driving. Maybe walking somewhere your body goes a lot.

The moment you caught yourself in the replay.

Just the catching.

2.

Now — do you recall what helped you notice you were reflecting?

Maybe a person. Maybe a place. Maybe a quiet. Maybe a phrase that landed.

Maybe nothing you can name — just the body settling.

Something helped.

What it was.

[illegible]

3.

Now — a Mr. Smiles look feeling.

Not the person — the feeling. Being seen and not corrected. Not fixed. Not made into a thing.

Just seen, and let alone.

You've been Mr. Smiled.

4.

As you look at Q1-3, anything surprise you?

Anything jump out?

You named the catching.

You named what helped.

You named the Mr. Smiles feeling.

You named what surprised you.

You've done this work before.

CARRY THIS.

This week — once — notice a Monday-feeling moment in your life right now.

A morning.

An ordinary stretch.

The unphotographed part.

That's where you actually live.

Most of the time.

That's enough.

You're about to walk out.

Some of what was seen is still in the hallway.

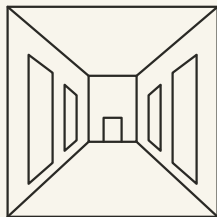
NEXT LESSON.

A glimpse of what's ahead.

Held lightly.

Where your eyes are looking.

See you in Lesson 7.



LESSON 7

The first time you actually spoke to him

Last lesson was about Monday.

*This one is about the conversation that finally
happened.*

You walked it.

People saw you.

You didn't notice most of it.

The years passed.

Glad you stayed.

A STORY.

One.

No hurry.

The joke.

Late senior year.

Maybe May.

A few weeks left.

The student is walking down the hall — that same hall, the one they've walked a thousand times — and there's Mr. Smiles, doing what he does.

Cart.

Mop.

Wiping something down.

Four years.

Four years of passing this man.

Hundreds of times.

Maybe a thousand.

Hearing the line.

Walking on.

Saying nothing back.

Not because of any decision — just because that's how it was.

He said it.

You went to class.

That was the relationship.

But today something happens.

The student heard a joke in English class earlier.

A grammar joke, of all things.

*The kind of corny thing an English teacher tells when they're trying to make
commas seem interesting.*

Let's eat Mom.

Let's eat, Mom.

Big difference.

One comma.

Cannibal versus dinner.

The class laughed.

The joke is still in the student's head as they walk.

And there's Mr. Smiles.

The student — without quite deciding to — walks over.

Hey, Mr. Smiles.

He looks up.

Mop pauses.

Eyes meet — fully, for maybe the first time ever.

Got a joke for you.

A beat.

Let's eat Mom. Let's eat, Mom.

The student waits.

Mr. Smiles takes it in.

The wink.

Then the smile.

Then — for the first time the student has ever heard — Mr. Smiles laughs.

Out loud.

A real laugh.

He has a laugh, it turns out.

Has had one this whole time.

The student is laughing now too.

Then Mr. Smiles — settling, smile still going — looks at the student.

Deadpan.

Eyes glittering.

Now give account of yourself. You don't eat your mom.

They both laugh.

Both standing there in the hallway.

Then Mr. Smiles settles.

Half-back to the mop, smile still going.

Says it half to the student, half to himself, like a man who's noticed something over thirty years and is just now putting it into words:

Sometimes they look at this when they just might look at something else.

Then back to the mop.

Same long strokes.

The student stands there a second.

Then walks on.

— *He had a laugh.*

— *You just never said hello.*

Halfway down the hall, the laugh trails off into a smile.

Then the smile settles into something quieter.

The exhale.

For four years the line had felt like an interrogation.

And it turns out it wasn't that at all.

The student doesn't put it in words.

Doesn't think aha.

The body just got it, the way a body gets a joke — all at once, before the mind catches up.

Walks the rest of the way to class lighter than it walked in.

Here's the thing about that conversation.

The student spent four years being witnessed and never witnessed back.

The line came at them; they never sent anything back.

Mr. Smiles had a laugh and a wink and a whole personality, and the student walked past it for four years without ever turning toward him.

The day the student finally turned toward Mr. Smiles — with a small joke, nothing important — was the day Mr. Smiles got to be a whole person to them.

And, in the same moment, the day the line finally landed.

Turns out you can be witnessed your whole life and still not catch what's being said until you turn toward the person saying it.

Until you give them something back.

Even something small.

Especially something small.

A joke about a comma will do.

A CLOSER LOOK.

Some questions. If you'd like.

A specific person — not in general.

1.

Bring back someone you walked past for years — or someone you finally walked up to.

Maybe a custodian. A lunch lady. A neighbor. The person behind a counter you saw every week. The one at the desk who knew your name and you didn't know theirs.

Just the person.

Who comes to mind.

2.

Now — what might you have offered them, if you'd thought to?

A question. A real hello. A joke. A name said back.

Maybe just acknowledging they were there.

Hello in there.

3.

Now — where have your eyes been looking?

In your own life. Right now. What's been getting the weight, the attention, the comma.

Is that where you'd put it if you stopped to choose?

Sometimes we get stuck looking at this when we might look at something else.

4.

I'm not sure about every person reading this question.

But if you're the one I'm thinking of — maybe even the one this question was written for — would you look up and smile?

You named the person.

You named what you might have offered.

You named where your eyes have been.

You looked up.

Give account of yourself.

CARRY THIS.

This week — once — turn toward someone you usually walk past.

A small offering.

A joke.

A real hello.

See what they have, now that you're looking.

That's enough.

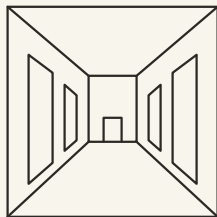
NEXT LESSON.

A glimpse of what's ahead.

Held lightly.

The letters.

See you in Lesson 8.



LESSON 8

Two letters

Your turn.

You're back.

Last lesson — the conversation.

The joke about the comma.

The wink.

The laugh.

The line you'd carried for four years finally landing somewhere.

You looked up.

Maybe you smiled.

Here's the thing — the moments we miss maybe haven't been missed.

It may be we choose to remember some moments and not others.

Because when a person remembers the witness, they actually
remember being witnessed.

Seven lessons taught.

This one is yours.

No rush with this one.

Take what you take.

Here is what this lesson asks of you.

Two letters.

Both letters are to you.

One to the you who's been staring.

Over emphasizing.

Using the comma.

One to the you who has, at times, looked up.

Removed the comma.

Held space for what a witness might actually see.

Two versions of you.

Both real.

Both yours.

A word on how to do this.

Here's what tends to land for people.

Write the first letter.

When you're done — hold it for a moment.

Don't put it away yet.

Don't decide what to do with it yet.

Just keep it close.

Then write the second letter.

Then read them together.

First one.

Then the other.

Then side by side.

That's the part that tends to do the work.

Reading them together.

Both at once.

Any way you'd like.

On paper.

On a screen.

In a notebook you have.

In a notebook you'll buy.

On the back of an envelope.

Short or long.

In one sitting or across a week.

If your body doesn't want to do this — don't.

The book continues to be the book.

The carrying continues whether you write these or not.

The first letter.

To the you who's been staring.

Over emphasizing.

Using the comma.

The version of you who's been carrying the moment.

The catch.

The 67.

The Tuesday that fell apart.

Or whatever yours is.

The moment the body keeps coming back to.

The one that's still warm or still tight.

The one that's been showing up on Mondays you didn't expect.

That version of you is here.

Has been here.

Doing what it's been doing.

Some things you might say to that you.

You don't have to say all of them.

You don't have to say any of them.

These are just here in case the body has trouble starting.

— *I see you.*

The moment that's still in there.

The one you've been carrying for years.

I see what you've been holding.

— *The moment was real.*

It happened.

The body kept it for a reason.

That mattered.

— *The staring made sense.*

You were inside it.

The story was running.

The comma fell where it fell.

That's how the body works.

— *The moment isn't the whole of you.*

It's been a big part of how you've walked through Mondays.

But it isn't the map.

— *You weren't alone in there.*

Somebody saw what was around the moment.

Saw more than you kept.

Maybe you didn't know.

— *Anything else.*

Whatever the body wants to say.

To the part of you that has been carrying.

All these years.

Take your time.

Or don't.

The letter is yours.

[illegible]

[illegible]

When you're done — hold it for a moment.

Don't put it away yet.

You're not done with this lesson yet.

The second letter.

To the you who has, at times, looked up.

Removed the comma.

Held space for what a witness might actually see.

The version of you who has, at times, caught yourself in the replay.

Stepped back from the moment you were inside.

Let your eyes go somewhere else for a second.

Not always.

Sometimes.

That version of you is also here.

Has been here.

More often than you've been counting.

Some things you might say to that you.

Again — you don't have to say any of these.

These are just here in case the body has trouble starting.

— *I see you too.*

In the half-second when the staring loosened and you looked somewhere else.

In the moments you almost missed.

I see what you've been doing.

— *You didn't decide to.*

Something noticed.

The rest of you slowed down enough to let the noticing happen.

That was it.

— *The carrying is still here.*

And — sometimes — you are too.

Both at once.

Not the looking-up instead of the carrying.

Not the carrying instead of the looking-up.

Both.

— *You've been held.*

By witnesses you saw.

By witnesses you didn't.

By your Mr. Smiles.

Maybe by more than one.

— *Keep looking up.*

Or don't.

Some moments you will.

Some moments the staring will run and you'll be inside it.

Some moments somebody will look up for you.

Either is alright.

— *Anything else.*

Whatever the body wants to say.

To the part of you that has been looking up.

Without keeping track.

Take your time with this one.

It often takes longer than the first.

Sometimes the body has been waiting a long time to be allowed to be
the you that isn't the staring.

Someone allowing it is you.

Now — read them together.

You have both letters now.

Read the first one.

Then the second one.

Then — if your body will let it happen — read them side by side.

Both at once.

This is the part the lesson has been pointing toward.

Both versions of you.

On the page in front of you.

The one who's been staring.

The one who has, at times, looked up.

Both real.

Both yours.

Both with you at the same time.

Take your time here.

Sit with both.

Let what happens happen.

Sometimes the body does something quiet when it reads both at once.

A small softening.

A small recognition.

A small smile.

Sometimes a longer stillness.

Sometimes not much at all.

Either is alright.

Then — what you do with them is yours.

Put them in a drawer.

File them somewhere safe.

Tear them up.

Burn them in the fireplace.

Frame them.

Read them again next year.

Where they go is yours.

The work has already happened.

One more thing.

Before this workbook closes — a man would like a word.

Mr. Smiles.

The custodian from the hallway.

The one with the cart.

He has a few things to say.

I never went past third grade.

Wasn't on purpose.

Just how it worked out where I came up.

Didn't slow me down much.

I had one helluva grandma.

She liked birds.

I liked birds.

She caught me staring at them once or twice.

Okay, more than that.

She didn't like staring too long at anything.

Even birds.

Even short lingering, she'd say, is sometimes too long.

Then she'd say it.

The line you've been hearing.

Give account of yourself.

She didn't explain it.

Didn't connect it to the birds or anything else.

Just said it and went back to whatever she was doing.

Took me a while to put it together.

I worked at the school for a long time.

Pushed the cart.

Mopped the floors.

Watched the kids come through.

And I noticed something.
Most of them had a moment that caught them.
Catches.
Test scores.
Friday nights that didn't go right.
Tuesdays nobody else noticed.
I saw it on their faces.
Saw it in how they walked into Monday.
Same thing my grandma saw on me.
Staring at birds.

I decided somewhere along the way to keep saying her line.
Don't know exactly when.
Wasn't a plan.
Just started doing it.
Kids would pass by.
I'd say it.
Most of them didn't catch it.
Some of them did, eventually.
That was enough.

If you've made it this far — you've done more than you know.

You noticed.

That's the whole thing.

Two letters.

Written by you.

To two versions of you who have been with you all along.

The one who's been staring.

The one who has, at times, looked up.

Both real.

You walked it.

People saw you.

You didn't notice most of it.

The years passed.

You're about to walk out.

Some of what was seen is still in the hallway.

Both yours.

Mr. Smiles is still in the hallway.

The cart is still rolling on.

The line is still being thrown.

Come back if you want.

It'll be here.

This was the workbook.

The carrying continues.

Some moments you'll catch.

Some moments the room will catch you when you can't catch yourself.

Some moments no one will.

Either is alright.

A Note from Mr. Smiles

Son

Funny mom joke

My Granma never much liked me lookin too long at anything. even
birds, i stared at them.

She'd say, kinda stern

even short lingering is sometimes too long.

Then she'd just say

Give account of yourself

Those words made me think

Harold Peterson

Mr. Smiles

A comment from the author.

Years working with people.

Never much liked wasted time.

Still don't.

Also prefer a more targeted focus.

Hence the domain.

Glad you stopped for a moment.

Hope something in here landed.

If not, hope you heard a good story.

Till we meet again.

Frank.

Caught Book Club Opportunity

There is no required way to do this.

Some people read the workbook on their own.

Some listen to the audio version.

Some do both.

Some groups read or listen together.

Some arrive having explored the lesson beforehand.

All are welcome.

Then meet.

Pull up a few chairs.

Have a coffee.

Take a walk.

Sit on a porch.

Leave an empty chair for David if you'd like.

Not because he has the answers.

Just because every now and then it helps to remember there is a quiet companion sitting with the conversation.

Ask a few questions.

What stood out?

What felt familiar?

What surprised you?

What might you be seeing differently?

What is the upside?

What is the downside?

What is the hmmm?

There is no need to agree.

There is no need to solve anything.

There is no need to leave with a plan.

Just look together for a little while.

Sometimes you will discover something about yourself.

Sometimes you will discover something about another person.

Sometimes you will discover something about the room.

Sometimes you will simply notice something sooner than you might have.

Then look up.

Smile.

Take a picture if you'd like.

And carry on.

That is enough.

Frank keeps the intention simple. If this work helps twenty more people, that will be enough.

You may read it free.

You may listen free.

You may find the physical book.

You may share it with someone else.

THE CAUGHT SOONER HOUSE

SOONER

Caught Paying the Bill

Caught Waiting

Caught Recovering

Caught Being

Caught Wanting

Caught Forgiving

28 Days · A Journal

Caught Leading

The audio

Caught Graduating

If something in these pages landed,

there's more on the porch.

Come sit awhile.

CAUGHTSOONER.COM