

“The most common form of despair
is not being who you are.”
– Soren Kierkegaard

Preface – An Apology

First, let me apologize for calling you Jimmy.

You’ve always hated that name, from the time we were little and Kathleen would call us it, often right in the middle of a big party with aunts and uncles and cousins standing around to smirk at the blonde-haired, spindly-legged kid being bossed and ordered around by his big sister.

“Jimmy! Get in the kitchen! Mom’s looking for you!”

I get why you didn’t like it. Jimmy is a kid’s name, the name of someone not to be taken seriously, and you didn’t want to be seen as a kid. You wanted to be a grown up, or at least to be treated that way. Even today, decades later, when one of your sisters or a cousin slips and calls you Jimmy, you cringe. Something in you rebels. *I’m not Jimmy! I’m Jim! Don’t call me Jimmy!*

And yet, the name fits you, Jimmy. Because you are a child, you always will be a child, and that’s the way it should be. A tree has no choice but to be a tree. Imagine going up to an oak and demanding it be something else. *You must be a forsythia bush! I command you to shoot out*

brilliant yellow spindles in the spring! How silly. To do that would be to deny the oak's essence. Its own unique beauty and purpose.

But that's what I did with you for too long, Jimmy. I, the ego mind, the controlling voice of reason and responsibility, tried to make you into something you are not. I felt the need to change you, to rein you in, to dress you up in adult clothes and present you to the world as smooth and polished and (dare I say it) perfect.

But here's the thing, Jimmy: you shouldn't need to worry about being an adult. In fact, you shouldn't need to worry at all. That's my job. My job is to take care of all the adult stuff – to pay the bills, mow the lawn, figure out where our next meal is coming from. Your job, Jimmy, is to have no job. Your job is to be a child. Your job is to live in that wondrous, timeless place called the present where life unfolds like a carpet rolled out just for us. Being a child is what makes you so wonderful – it's what makes life so wonderful. I need you to keep being who you are, because without that child within me, being an adult would be drudgery and that's not the way it's supposed to be.

And that's the second thing I'd like to apologize to you for. We've been through a lot together, Jimmy. Some awful stuff: cancer, broken bones, surgeries, anxiety, terrible bouts of depression where for years everything went so dark that not even electricity could cut through it. That stuff was my doing, Jimmy. None of it was your fault. I'm supposed to keep you safe, to give you the space to be yourself, and for years I didn't do a good job of that.

Quite frankly, it was because I was ignorant. I didn't realize what I was doing. I was hellbent on achieving great things and in so doing I was trying to force life, instead of allowing it to flow like a stream as it's meant to. I had things in my head that I didn't realize were driving me – perceived insecurities and shortcomings that I was trying to make up for. I wanted to be seen by others as important and worthy. I wanted to be known, recognized, acknowledged, praised – all

because I felt deep down that no one noticed me. All of that stuff was in my head. It wasn't real, but it caused us a great deal of needless suffering.

I had it all wrong. I thought that accomplishment is what creates importance in life. I thought that one must achieve in order to be someone, when in reality it's the other way around. Being comes first. Being is the primal force. We don't need to earn being. We don't need to be worthy of it. Being is a gift that's given to all of us. All else flows from that.

I'm wiser now. I know some things that I didn't know back then. That's not to say I'm perfect, because I'm not and never will be. I'm not perfect, you're not perfect, none of us is perfect and that's all right. I've given up on all of that, Jimmy – all of that vain striving for bright shiny ideals that don't exist in the real world.

No, I have a lot more yet to learn, but I can see now the mistakes I've made in the past. I can see now what I did, and what I didn't do, that got us into those dark places where we've been. And I promise you that I won't lead you back there again.

Which is why I am writing this. To share what we've learned with others who are struggling with the black beast so that they might find hope. Because as we know all too well, Jimmy, there is always hope. Even when things seem hopeless, especially when things seem hopeless, there is a path back to joy and peace, if only we have the courage and the wisdom to find it.

But most of all I want to thank you, Jimmy. Thank you for sticking with me, for not giving up. In the midst of our darkest hours, when we lay strapped to the hospital bed with electrodes stuck to our temples, when driving over the cliff into the local quarry seemed the only answer to our exhausted mind, you were always there, a green shoot waiting to sprout when given the chance. That is your nature, after all – to spring back, ever green, ever young, ever joyful – like nature itself.

So go play, Jimmy. Run with the wind at your back and joy bursting in your lungs. Run without heed of what others may think. Run without thought of the past or the future. I will be there alongside you, with my aging arthritic limbs, doing my best to keep up.

Ah, yes, Jimmy, I can feel the sun overhead. The grass soft beneath our feet. Air crisp with the smell of earth and leaves. Kids shouting. The distant cawing of crows. Running, sun in our face, wind at our backs, through the halcyon fields of our youth.