

Coffee Grounds

Heard today. Book is toast. Contract, too. Probably lose the house and Meredith with it. Came up to the cabin. Tell myself I'm not sure what I had in mind. Got up; that's something. Throw my coffee grounds off the porch. They'll be dirt someday.

I'm alone in a small cabin in the cold mountains, and I try to focus—not struggle with the old stuff—just think forward. Feel despair pulling me backward and I try to ignore it. The mountains are beautiful. The hawks crow in the morning, and I have to look for moose before I go out. I wonder how long it will be before I can get back to my old life.

The world is varied casts of gray. I tell myself I delight in the variation between bleak and bleaker. Think it's a classic subtlety. Argue with myself that it's not. But it makes me think, and breathe, at least a few more times, and a squirrel crosses my path. It must be 20 degrees below zero, and the squirrel skips on the snow. I can't believe it survives in this cold, blank, hard-edged world. I begin to write. And I throw my coffee grounds.

Agent emailed. Someday I'll get a call. A call is good news. An email ... just news. But news keeps me alive. News is hope. And hope is the juice that I live on. So I read as much hope between the words as I can without feeling ridiculous. And I throw my coffee grounds.

I still can't believe that Ross Peterman stole my notebook in seventh grade, and he never gave it back, and it really wasn't such a big deal, but there was a picture in there that I had drawn. Nothing really. But something you wouldn't want anyone else to see. And Ross Peterman didn't talk to me for three years. And he never mentioned the notebook. And I hope he's gotten over it by now, because it's nothing to dwell on, and it was middle school for fuck's sake. And not a single additional thought should be wasted on it. And I throw my coffee grounds.

The elk bugled tonight. The men calling the ladies, singing like rock stars, collecting a harem. There is something young and powerful in their sound. You're selling yourself pretty hard when you make that noise. You've gotta believe in yourself, because they can hear it when you don't. And I feel a little lost, but I keep writing. And I throw my coffee grounds.

There was some sort of mess in the news today. Something went terribly wrong. Total collapse. The world may never be the same. I caught three trout. Beauties. Wrote well afterwards. Banner day. Could ride this for months. And I throw my coffee grounds.

What am I doing here? Heard from the agent today. News. Just news. Don't I have a responsibility to be somewhere? Do something? Wouldn't that be a smitch more meaningful? To some people at least? Maybe even myself? Wrote well. I think I'm onto something with this old west story. And I throw my coffee grounds.

Writing sucks! Can't believe I think I can just sit on a couch and make stuff up and people will send me money. I'm delusional. How do you make stuff up anyway? Just one original thought. It's completely beyond me. Haven't written a memorable sentence in days. I think about bartending. Maybe I could do that. Maybe. And I throw my coffee grounds.

A journal wants one of my stories. Just a riff from an abandoned novel. Wrote it in longhand in one afternoon. Remember the day. Thought I should write that way every single day. Haven't since. And I throw my coffee grounds.

My mother died today. She didn't suffer—that was a change. She sure suffered with me. She never understood me; hard not to take that as a slight. I could have been an orthodontist; could've been a great one. Can you believe it? Suppose I'll have to go back and sort things out. And I throw my coffee grounds.

We held the service at her church. She went there every Sunday for thirty years. I realize I had no idea what it looked like. Sparse and white. Really white. Made you believe in perfection. Gave you hope, except for the folding chairs. No hope there. She had a lot of people who loved her. They say she was proud of me. They asked about my writing. I felt her there. Felt her smiling. Cried all the way home. Despite everything. Poured myself into a story. And I throw my coffee grounds.

It's been a long slog. I'm stuck in the middle of a slowly-decaying, fatally-diseased, not-going-to-make-it, just-go-on-without-me, elephantine, over-plotted, two-mile-an-hour novel. It has absolutely no prospects of ever rising above being mildly interesting. The characters don't do anything. They're not even close to being alive. Blew their load at the interview. Can you believe these people? What the fuck are they thinking? I'll never understand how to do this. And I throw my coffee grounds.

Agent called. Called! Good news. Actual news. A publisher. Loved the Mom story. (Hope he doesn't Google and find out Mom is fine and living in Scottsdale, if you call that fine.) The publisher wants a blog, just like the story. Random thoughts, with heart. That's what he said: "with heart". Didn't have the balls to set him straight before this gets out of hand. And I throw my coffee grounds.

Half-way through my next story. Really clever. Could be my best. Can't wait to see where it goes. And I throw my coffee grounds.

I am wasting my life. This story doesn't make any sense. Nonsensical, turgid, boring piece of crap. Even Mom doesn't want to hear from me. Don't really blame her. All her friends read the story. I'm sure they're shocked anyone could actually write those things about their

mother. It's getting cold out. I wonder if I chopped enough wood for the winter. And I throw my coffee grounds.

Agent called. Wants another story. I didn't even know people bought stories anymore. She thinks I should try memoir. Memoir? I sit in a cabin. What could be interesting about that? Who would read it? Too busy with the blog, I tell her. Great ideas. Really coming along. And I throw my coffee grounds.

I don't know what to write for this fucking blog. Considered getting really riled up about school boards or something. The idea didn't pop. Never been to a school board meeting. Not very fertile ground. Maybe something about dogs. Someone I know must have a dog. And I throw my coffee grounds.

Oh, my God. There are dogs everywhere around here. Never noticed it before. Saw one sitting on a barstool. I think his owner tends the bar. I bought him a hamburger . . . the dog, not the owner. Then the band started. I should get out more.

Oh, my God, it hurts so much being me today. My head is pounding. Huge bludgeoning beats. This keyboard is the loudest thing I have ever heard in my life. Every letter brings pain. Think I met a dog last night. In a bar. That can't be right. Lost my wallet, too. Got the first blog out. And I throw my coffee grounds.

People who read blogs are weird. People who get upset about dogs in bars are even weirder. They say it's a bad influence. Not sure on who. Agent called. The blog is going through the roof. Thinks she can sell a book. Impossible. And I throw my coffee grounds.

Seven months. Just figured it out. Seriously. Not a word on the book in seven months, but I wasn't keeping track. Nine stories, half a novel, thirty-one blogs, and way too many nights at

that bar. The dog likes me. His name is Max. His owner says Max found my wallet on the floor.
Smart dog.

Agent called. She wants an answer on the book deal for Max Beagle, Dog Detective.
Have to get back to her. The ideas are flowing. Sometimes there are just too many, and I grab what I can and wrestle them to the page before they vanish. Hope they mean something when I read them later. Hope they have heart. Think I'll even start a new novel. And I throw my coffee grounds, because they'll be dirt someday.