

# LIVING HALFWAY



*For the big brown dog.*

*I miss her.*

*And for the little yellow puppy.*

*Someday I will miss her, too.*

## HELLO

Maybe you've recently puked up some ayahuasca in a Laurel Canyon VRBO, or dropped a half-hit of LSD at a tech-sponsored Burning Man camp, in an accelerated search for some sort of life-affirming wisdom you can't quite grasp.

Grasping anything of value can be tough sledding, especially when you have five fingers fumbling with the self-driving feature on your Tesla, and the other five holding your phone.

You're not alone.

Lonely, perhaps.

But not alone.

Many of us have grown tired of living halfway to someday, stalled out on popular culture's road, paved with impermanence and ultimately hollow promises. The social media age has only magnified this delusion of comparative happiness, and we desperately need a reset button, some sort of shift in awareness that

will give the colors of our lives a deeper, truer vibrancy.

I say *you* and *we* and *us*, but who the fuck am I kidding?

This is about me.

## SHITBAG

I'm a million miles away, floating along the western edge of the nature preserve down the street from my house, where the dawn mist clings to the willows and a soft sea wind blows dove melodies from the cottonwood trees.

Tribal legends have drifted for ten thousand years through these mystic reeds, rooted in the nourishing collision of fresh water from the coastal mountains and the saltwater bounty of the ocean. I've been gone from this place for a while, but now I drift here, too, in this confluence of ancient and personal history.

My fingers brush the waist-high grass as I breathe deep and walk moccasin-quiet through the early morning peace, daydreaming that instead of a reluctant warrior, I'm Russell Crowe at the end of *Gladiator*, brushing the same waist-high grass on a battle-weary return home to my beautiful family.

A self-composed cinematic theme song lifts this scene into the heavens of redemption, and I am triumph embodied, I am success realized, I am a dream come true and a lost love found, I am everything I thought I'd be by now, I am a crinkling, strained

crunch under my right foot.

I stop mid-stride, and look down to discover a little pink piece of plastic peeking out from under my shoe.

But this isn't just any little pink piece of plastic.

This is a little pink plastic bag of dog shit.

Somebody has watched their precious LuLu take a dump, wrapped the waste in a little pink plastic bag, and left the accomplishment on the side of the trail.

Who does that?

I'll tell you who.

**shitbag** (*n*) *an individual bearing the marks of entitlement who wilts in the face of responsibility*

A shitbag.

Because I saw this same little pink plastic bag with the double-knot right here yesterday, and gave the depositing party the benefit of the doubt, hoping they'd pick the special delivery up on their way out.

But now I know they had no intention of coming back. They elected to abandon their shit for someone else to deal with. Maybe the burden was too heavy to carry, or they were worried they'd get a disease, although that Tinder swipe at the wine bar is likely a more reliable infectious option.

I have a lot of experience in this area.

Well, not in banging a Tinder swipe.

Everything about my old dog was big and brown, and I used to carry plastic bags of her substantial turds out of this nature preserve. The only transmission I ever encountered was a warmish palm, not exactly unwelcome on chilly walks, but the pebbles in this bag are rock-hard cold from being left outside overnight.

Shitbags must have some sort of strength in numbers, which makes them feel better about leaving their shit for other people to deal with. I've been seeing little pink, black, brown and green plastic bags lurking everywhere, from the side of this trail to the beach, sidewalk and riverbank. I even saw one hanging from a tree last week, like a Christmas turd ornament.

I pick up as many of those bags as my small hands and match-stick forearms will hold, carry them wherever they need to go, and throw them away. Like I'm doing right now.

Imagine the world if we all dealt with our own shit, instead of packaging it up pretty and leaving it for someone else to deal with.

I'm talking about life here, shitbag.

And your little pink plastic bag of shit.