THE BORROWED DECADE

A NOVEL

B. ALAN BOURGEOIS

THE BORROWED DECADE

Copyright © 2026 B. Alan Bourgeois.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior written permission of the copyright holder, except for brief quotations permitted by law.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, events, businesses, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or to actual events is coincidental.

For inquiries concerning this book or subsidiary rights:
TexasAuthorsPress.com

ISBN:

First Edition

DEDICATION

For those who have wondered what another decade might have held—and for those who choose to live fully in the time they have.

CONTENTS

ACT I — THE LIVES THEY LIVED 6
Chapter One: The Watch That Had Stopped 7
Chapter Two: The Life Preston Built 16
Chapter Three: The Empty Studio 25
Chapter Four: Someday Never Came 32
Chapter Five: The Clock Shop Door 40
Chapter Six: A Different Kind of Freedom 51
Chapter Seven: The Paint Still Wet 61
Chapter Eight: The Time Left 69
Chapter Nine: Terms of the Gift 78
Chapter Ten: Four Doors, Four Dates 92
ACT II — THE YEARS THEY WANTED 103
Chapter Eleven: First Day of College 104
Chapter Twelve: Unhidden 112
Chapter Thirteen: The Studio and the Kitchen 120
Chapter Fourteen: Say Yes 129
Chapter Fifteen: Eli 139
Chapter Sixteen: Adrian 148
Chapter Seventeen: Marina's Eye 156
Chapter Eighteen: On the Road 164
Chapter Nineteen: Professor Voss 172
Chapter Twenty: A Friend Who Speaks Plainly 180
Chapter Twenty-One: An Ordinary Tuesday 187
Chapter Twenty-Two: The People We Return To 197
ACT III — THE REALITY OF ANOTHER LIFE 206
Chapter Twenty-Three: The Measure of Success 207
Chapter Twenty-Four: No One Is Owned 216
Chapter Twenty-Five: The First Warning 224
Chapter Twenty-Six: The Difficult Conversation 233
Chapter Twenty-Seven: After Graduation 242
Chapter Twenty-Eight: Julian 250
Chapter Twenty-Nine: The Weight of Waiting 259
Chapter Thirty: A Life Beyond Travel 266
Chapter Thirty-One: The Price of Recognition 275
Chapter Thirty-Two: The Shape of Commitment 284
Chapter Thirty-Three: Peter 293
Chapter Thirty-Four: Art's Scare 302
Chapter Thirty-Five: The First Unfinished Canvas 310
Chapter Thirty-Six: The Doctor's Pause 320
ACT IV — THE LAST YEARS 329
Chapter Thirty-Seven: Becca's Trust 330
Chapter Thirty-Eight: An Unmanageable Heart 339
Chapter Thirty-Nine: Gabe's Light 347
Chapter Forty: The News About Hank 357
Chapter Forty-One: The Apology Not Made 368

Chapter Forty-Two: Freedom Without Certainty 377
Chapter Forty-Three: The Gallery Offer 386
Chapter Forty-Four: What Grief Leaves 397
Chapter Forty-Five: The Last Day of Each Life 406
Chapter Forty-Six: Ten Years Later 419

ACT V — THE SECOND CHOICE 430

Chapter Forty-Seven: What Russell Remembers 431
Chapter Forty-Eight: The Life He Will Keep 441
Chapter Forty-Nine: What Nate Would Lose 451
Chapter Fifty: The Unsettled Choice 459
Chapter Fifty-One: Two Deaths of Peter 470
Chapter Fifty-Two: The Painter's Decision 480
Chapter Fifty-Three: A Gift Without Ownership 489
Chapter Fifty-Four: One Coherent World 498

ACT VI — THE LIVES THAT REMAIN 507

Chapter Fifty-Five: The Degree He Cannot Show 508
Chapter Fifty-Six: A Marriage in the Balance 518
Chapter Fifty-Seven: The Paintings That Exist 527
Chapter Fifty-Eight: At Seventy-Nine 537
Chapter Fifty-Nine: Four Customers 546
Chapter Sixty: Beyond the Shop Door 556
Chapter Sixty-One: Two Years of Living 564
Chapter Sixty-Two: The Time We Have 574

ACT I

THE LIVES THEY LIVED

Chapter One:
The Watch That Had Stopped

People sometimes ask me whether a broken clock is worth repairing.

I generally tell them that depends on the clock.

A brass carriage clock with a damaged spring might be restored in an afternoon. A nineteenth-century pocket watch with missing parts could require weeks of patient attention. And occasionally, someone brings me a perfectly functional clock that simply needs winding.

People are much the same, although they are considerably less willing to admit when something has stopped working.

Russell Cade was not a man anyone would have described as unsuccessful.

He had made a good living, enjoyed a long relationship with a man who loved him, and reached an age when he no longer needed to justify every hour of his day.

Nevertheless, he carried a question that had followed him for more than forty years.

It was not a particularly unusual question.

What made Russell interesting was how thoroughly he had convinced himself that he already knew the answer.

• • •

Russell Cade was sixty-two years old when he discovered that the word commencement could make him feel like a failure.

He had encountered the word thousands of times throughout his professional career. He had written commencement speeches, prepared publicity materials for graduation ceremonies, and once spent three increasingly unpleasant weeks negotiating with a university over the

placement of sponsor logos on a printed program.

None of those experiences had particularly troubled him.

But on a warm Thursday morning in Austin, sitting at the kitchen table with his second cup of coffee, he found himself staring at a photograph in the newspaper.

Russell read the article twice.

“Well, that's dramatic.”

Thomas Whitcomb stood in the kitchen doorway, holding an empty coffee mug.

“What is?”

“The way you just folded that newspaper. You'd think it had insulted your ancestors.”

Russell looked up. “I folded a newspaper.”

“You attacked a newspaper. There was a difference.”

Thomas crossed the kitchen and placed his mug beneath the coffee maker. At sixty-five, he remained irritatingly lean, with the straight shoulders and unhurried movements of a man who had spent much of his professional life standing over architectural drawings. His short silver-gray hair was still damp from the shower, and he wore a pale linen shirt with the sleeves rolled to his elbows.

Russell had been with him for twenty-seven years.

“It was an article about college graduates,” Russell said.

Thomas glanced at the folded paper.

“Ah.”

“Don't do that.”

“Do what?”

“That little 'ah.'”

“I only have one 'ah,' Russell. You're going to have to be more specific.”

Russell looked back at the newspaper.

Thomas poured his coffee, added a little milk, and sat across from him.

“Did the article upset you?”

“No.”

Thomas waited.

“It didn't upset me,” Russell said. “It just got me thinking.”

“About college.”

“Yes.”

Thomas nodded and took a sip.

“You're doing it again,” Russell said.

“What?”

“Looking at me as though you know what I'm about to say.”

“I probably do.”

“Then save us both the trouble and say it.”

Thomas considered him over the rim of his mug.

“You wish you'd gone.”

Russell looked toward the kitchen window.

“Yes,” Russell said.

Thomas set down his cup.

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“Not particularly.”

“All right.”

Russell picked up the newspaper again.

“Of course, the irony is that I helped put people through college. I worked with university marketing departments. I negotiated campaigns that raised millions of dollars. I probably know more about how universities operate than half the people running them.”

“Possibly.”

“And nobody ever asked me where I went to school when they needed a campaign rescued.”

“That isn't entirely true.”

Russell frowned.

“There was that woman in Dallas,” Thomas reminded him. “The one who kept calling you Richard.”

“She asked where I went to college because she wanted to know whether we'd attended the same one.”

“And you told her?”

“That I went to the University of Hard Knocks.”

Thomas closed his eyes briefly.

“Yes. I remember. You said that for approximately twenty-five years.”

“It was funny.”

“It was funny the first eight.”

Russell couldn't help smiling.

“I wonder sometimes,” he said.

Thomas said nothing.

“What I would have been like.”

“At college?”

“If I'd gone. If I'd had that experience. Four years surrounded by people learning things, debating things, finding out who they were.”

“You found out who you were.”

“Eventually.”

“Most people do.”

“That's not the same.”

Thomas watched him.

Russell knew he was being unfair, although he couldn't have explained exactly why.

“I could have been a professor,” Russell said.

Thomas raised an eyebrow.

“You might have been.”

“Or a journalist. An actual journalist. Not someone who spent years helping people explain why they deserved positive coverage.”

“You were very good at that.”

“That's hardly the point.”

“No, I suppose it isn't.”

Russell leaned back in his chair.

“When I was eighteen, going to college wasn't really an option. There was work. There were bills. There were things that needed doing. And every year I told myself I'd go eventually.”

Thomas nodded.

“Then I was twenty-five and doing well. Then thirty, and doing better. By forty, everyone assumed I had a degree because I knew what I was talking about.”

“You usually did.”

“Usually?”

“There's a memorable exception involving a presentation on digital marketing.”

Russell pointed at him.

“That was 1998. Nobody knew what they were doing.”

“Which was my impression at the time.”

Thomas smiled, but Russell could not quite join him.

Thomas interrupted his thoughts.

“You know you could still take classes.”

Russell laughed.

“There it is.”

“What?”

“The practical solution.”

“It is practical.”

“I'm sixty-two, Thomas.”

“And?”

“I don't want to be the old man in the classroom.”

“Then you might want to avoid becoming the old man complaining about not being in the classroom.”

Russell gave him a wounded look.

Thomas smiled.

“I love you, but you've spent twenty-seven years telling me that life is what you make of it. Perhaps you should consider listening to yourself.”

“That's deeply irritating advice.”

“I learned from a master.”

Russell unfolded the newspaper again.

Thomas stood and carried his mug to the sink.

“We're going to the university this afternoon, remember?”

Russell looked up.

“What?”

“The lecture. Architecture, public spaces, community development. You agreed to come.”

“That's today?”

“Four o'clock.”

“I thought it was next Thursday.”

“You thought that last Thursday.”

Russell looked toward the clock above the refrigerator.

“Why would anyone schedule a lecture at four in the afternoon?”

“Because they assume retired people have nothing better to do.”

“They're not entirely wrong.”

Thomas leaned down and kissed the top of his head.

“Try not to be too successful before lunch.”

Russell swatted at him with the folded newspaper.

For a moment, the old regret loosened its grip.

Then Thomas left the kitchen, and Russell looked at the photograph again.

He wondered what the young man had been thinking

when the picture was taken.

He wondered whether it was possible to miss a life one had never lived.

• • •

That afternoon, Thomas took Russell to a campus lecture. Russell expected to recognize the familiar satisfaction of asking a good question. What followed surprised him.

The lecture began with a discussion of how public spaces influenced social interaction.

The speaker, a woman with silver-streaked hair and an expressive speaking style, described the unintended consequences of urban development. She presented photographs, maps, and examples from cities across the country.

Russell enjoyed the presentation.

More than he expected.

When the speaker opened the floor for questions, Russell raised his hand.

“Yes, the gentleman in the navy jacket.”

Russell sat a little straighter.

“You've spoken quite a bit about designing public spaces to encourage connection,” he began. “But doesn't that assume people are willing to connect in the first place? You can build a beautiful park and fill it with seating, but if the surrounding community doesn't trust the institutions responsible for the project, isn't the design itself somewhat irrelevant?”

The speaker smiled.

“That's an excellent question.”

Russell felt the familiar, deeply satisfying warmth of approval.

Russell followed up with an example from a campaign he had once managed.

Thomas leaned close.

“Well done.”

Russell smiled.

A student near the front raised her hand. “What if the underlying research is wrong?” she asked.

The speaker paused.

“Which part?”

“The assumption that more social interaction is always desirable. You've discussed connection as though it's automatically beneficial. But some communities might value privacy more than public engagement. What if the design goals are based on what planners think people should want instead of what the people actually want?”

Russell felt a flicker of irritation.

“Now,” she said, “that's where we should have started.”

The discussion that followed was unlike anything Russell had expected.

Students challenged the speaker's assumptions. The speaker challenged theirs. Someone referred to a study Russell had never heard of. Another student disagreed with its methodology. A third asked whether the debate itself reflected the biases of people privileged enough to attend university.

They were simply trying to understand something.

Russell sat very still.

He had spent most of his professional life making arguments sound convincing.

He had rarely been in a room where people appeared genuinely delighted to discover that their arguments might be wrong.

For the first time that afternoon, he understood the difference.

• • •

Later that evening, Thomas went to bed while Russell remained in the study.

He had opened his laptop intending to look at the continuing education course catalog.

Instead, he found himself browsing photographs of university campuses.

Students in libraries.

Students carrying cardboard boxes into residence halls while anxious parents hovered nearby.

He clicked on an article about the experiences of first-generation college students.

Then another.

He read an account of a man who had earned his degree at seventy-three.

He admired the man. He genuinely did.

But the story left him with the uncomfortable realization that he did not want to be an admirable seventy-three-year-old graduate.

Russell closed the laptop.

He reached toward a wooden box on the lower shelf.

It had been there for so long that he couldn't remember the last time he'd opened it.

Inside were old business cards, a faded photograph, a fountain pen that no longer worked, and a wristwatch.

Russell lifted the watch from the box.

He had purchased it with money from one of his earliest jobs.

At eighteen, he had been enormously proud of owning something that made him look like a man with a future.

Eleven seventeen.

Nothing.

He wound the crown gently, but the second hand did not move.

Russell smiled sadly.

“Well,” he murmured, “that makes two of us.”

It wasn't valuable. Repairing it would probably cost more than replacing it.

He remembered being eighteen, standing outside the shop where he had bought it, fastening the strap around his wrist.

He remembered feeling certain that so much time was waiting for him.

College.

Travel.

Love.

A career.

All the things that older people kept telling him required patience and hard work.

He had been patient.

Russell opened the laptop again.

The continuing education catalog was still available in

another browser tab.

Registration was open.

The course met Tuesday afternoons, and the tuition was entirely affordable.

No practical obstacle.

No demanding employer.

No family emergency.

No financial crisis.

Nothing standing between Russell Cade and a classroom except the knowledge that he would enter it as a sixty-two-year-old man.

Then he closed the browser.

From the bedroom came the faint sound of Thomas moving in his sleep.

Russell picked up the watch once more.

He had spent decades believing that his lack of a college education was the one unfinished chapter in an otherwise successful life.

He set the watch carefully beside the laptop, switched off the desk lamp, and walked toward the bedroom.

Behind him, in the darkness, the hands remained fixed at eleven seventeen.

Russell did not know that a few days later he would carry the watch into a small repair shop.

He had no reason to believe that the elderly proprietor would ask him a question he had spent forty-four years avoiding.

And he certainly did not imagine that, before long, he would be given something far more dangerous than the opportunity to repair an old watch.

He would be given the opportunity to discover whether the life he believed he had missed was truly the life he wanted.

Chapter Two:
The Life Preston Built

Preston Bellamy had never liked the expression living your best life.

In his experience, the people who used it most often were either trying to sell something or had very little experience with invoices.

A good life, he believed, was built. You made decisions, accepted responsibilities, corrected mistakes, and learned when to stop throwing money at a problem. The result was not necessarily exciting, but it was dependable. Dependable had always struck Preston as an undervalued virtue.

He had been dependable for a very long time.

At sixty-six, he was a little broader through the middle than he liked to admit, although his six-foot-one frame still carried the suggestion of the strong young man who had begun working straight out of high school. His hair had thinned into salt and pepper. He possessed dark blue eyes, a slightly crooked nose, and hands that looked more accustomed to moving crates than signing contracts. The expensive watch on his wrist was the one concession to luxury he had never attempted to justify.

He had earned it, he liked to say.

He had earned most things.

That was precisely what made the unearned years so difficult to forget.

• • •

That evening, Preston and Nate attended an exhibition about the history of their community.

They arrived at the arts center shortly before six.

The building had once been a small commercial property, the sort Preston would have regarded as a

maintenance problem. Tonight its windows glowed warmly onto the sidewalk. Inside, voices carried through an open doorway, accompanied by music and the clink of glasses. Someone had arranged a row of folding chairs near the back wall. No two of them matched.

“Your donation couldn't buy uniform furniture?” Preston murmured.

Nate elbowed him.

“Behave.”

“I'm making an observation.”

“You're making the observation you always make.”

A photograph from the late eighties showed a crowded room of men laughing beneath strings of cheap paper decorations. In another image, people stood shoulder to shoulder at a candlelight vigil, their faces serious and pale in the flash.

Preston stopped before that one.

Beside him, Nate said quietly, “I knew two of the men in that photograph.”

Preston turned.

“You never told me.”

“We didn't know each other yet.”

“I know. I meant—”

“I know what you meant.”

Nate stood for a moment longer, then moved toward another display.

Preston followed.

Preston found himself looking from one picture to the next with an emotion he could not immediately name.

At thirty-five, he had met Nate.

Even then, the years did not become suddenly easy. Preston had taken him to restaurants in unfamiliar neighborhoods rather than places he frequented with colleagues. He had introduced him to people outside the business, but rarely to those inside it. He had gone to more company dinners alone than he cared to count.

It was hard to admit now that he had made some of those choices not because someone ordered him to, but because he feared what might happen if he didn't.

Nate stopped in front of a photograph mounted slightly below eye level.

“Preston.”

Something in his voice made Preston look up.

The photograph was from a community celebration many years earlier. A handwritten date beneath it placed the gathering in the summer of 1998. Preston recognized the folding tables, the crowded courtyard, and an enormous banner someone had insisted on hanging despite the wind.

Nate stopped short.

There he was in the photograph, younger and slimmer, with dark-blond hair and a smile so wide Preston could almost hear him laughing. He stood beside a group of friends, one hand lifted as though calling to somebody beyond the frame.

And there, near the far edge of the image, was Preston.

He stood several feet away, his shirt tucked neatly into his trousers, one hand holding a paper cup. His younger face was turned toward the photographer, but his body angled toward the nearest exit.

He had spent years perfecting it.

“Did you know they had this?” Preston asked.

“No.”

“That's me.”

“I noticed.”

“I look miserable.”

“You weren't miserable.”

Preston studied the photograph. “I look as though I'm waiting for someone to give me a parking ticket.”

Nate laughed softly.

“You were worried an acquaintance might see you.”

“Was I?”

“Yes. You'd just signed that contract with the distribution company.”

Preston remembered the contract. He could still recall the numbers, the delivery deadlines, and the clause he had insisted they rewrite.

He couldn't remember the celebration at all.

“Did we have a good time?” he asked.

Nate looked at the photograph for so long that Preston began to regret the question.

“I did,” Nate said.

The words were gentle. That made them harder to hear.

“And you?”

“You kept looking at your watch.”

Preston glanced instinctively at the expensive watch on his wrist.

Nate noticed.

Neither of them commented.

• • •

Before they left, the exhibition organizer approached Preston and asked whether he would say a few words as one of the event’s donors. He had prepared remarks about preserving neighborhood history, the sort of speech he could have given without notes. Looking again at the photograph of himself near the exit, he put the page aside. He told the small gathering that the pictures recorded not only who had shown up, but also how difficult showing up could be. He admitted that for years he had attended events such as this one while checking the door, afraid a business acquaintance might recognize him. He had nearly mistaken his caution for wisdom. The room stayed quiet until he finished. Nate stood near the back, listening.

In the car, Nate said nothing for the first several blocks.

Preston kept both hands on the steering wheel.

“Well?” he finally asked.

“Well what?”

“The speech.”

“You were good.”

“That's it?”

“What would you prefer? A scoring system?”

“I wouldn't object to constructive feedback.”

“I know.”

Nate looked out at the passing storefronts.

“You surprised me.”

“I surprised myself.”

“You don't usually admit when you're afraid.”

“Everyone gets afraid.”

“True. But you normally call it risk assessment.”

“I didn't remember that photograph,” he said.

“The one from the party?”

“Yes.”

“I didn't expect you to.”

“Why not?”

“Because you spent that afternoon making sure no one from work would recognize you. I was there to celebrate with friends. We weren't really at the same party.”

“I was there,” Preston said.

“Your body was.”

“Do you regret staying with me?”

Nate turned so quickly that Preston glanced at him.

“No.”

“Not ever?”

“That's a ridiculous question.”

“I'd appreciate an answer.”

“I gave you one.”

“There were times I was angry with you. There were times I wanted you to put my hand in yours at a restaurant without checking who was sitting nearby. There were times I felt you were asking me to be grateful for whatever part of your life you were willing to share.”

Preston felt the words more sharply than he expected.

“But I knew who you were,” Nate continued. “The whole person. Not only the man who was afraid. I chose to stay. I chose you. You didn't make that decision for me.”

They drove through another intersection.

“And you did change,” Nate added. “Not overnight. Not neatly. But you did. You don't get to erase everything we've lived because you're disappointed with the way some of it began.”

“I'm not trying to erase it.”

“Then don't.”

Preston glanced at him.

“You're getting rather stern.”

“I spent thirty years in schools, Preston. This isn't stern.”

“What would stern look like?”

“A phone call to your parents.”

“I wouldn't trade our life,” Preston said.

“I know.”

“Not for anything.”

“I know that, too.”

Preston hesitated.

“But I wonder about the rest of it.”

Nate waited.

“About what it would have been like to be thirty without spending every day calculating who might find out. To go where I wanted. Meet people openly. Make a complete fool of myself over someone instead of doing it privately.”

“You managed that occasionally,” Nate said.

“I'm trying to be serious.”

“So am I.”

Preston looked ahead.

“Good and bad,” he said. “I think I missed both.”

Nate nodded slowly.

“That,” he said, “I understand.”

• • •

At home, Preston did what he always did when an evening had unsettled him: he organized something.

He washed the glasses left in the sink, moved the mail into a neat pile, and checked the front door twice. Then he returned to the study and began sorting receipts from a drawer that had not needed attention in six months.

His hands worked automatically.

The speech had left him feeling exposed in a way he hadn't anticipated.

He was not sure how to forgive the younger man who had made those choices.

From the doorway, Nate said, “You're alphabetizing receipts again.”

“Only the ones that belong together.”

“Which is, of course, what alphabetizing means.”

Preston set down the stack.

Nate entered carrying a small cardboard box.

“This is what I was looking for this morning.”

Preston lifted a photograph showing the two of them beside a borrowed truck. Nate's hair was dark blond. Preston's was thick and nearly black. They were both sunburned and laughing.

“I remember that table,” Preston said.

“You should. You claimed the instructions were wrong and insisted you could do better.”

“They were wrong.”

“We ate off the floor for two days.”

“Because you refused to let me finish.”

“Because you had attached the legs to the top backward.”

Preston laughed again.

He turned over another photograph. Nate stood in the doorway of their first apartment wearing a shirt that Preston remembered buying for him. The room behind Nate was almost empty.

“Look at us,” Preston said.

Nate leaned against the desk.

“We were rather handsome.”

“We still are.”

“One of us has maintained excellent standards.”

“I assume you mean me.”

“Of course you do.”

Preston returned the photograph to the box. Beneath it lay an old invitation to a neighborhood gathering. He remembered declining it because someone from a client's office had been expected to attend.

He did not imagine a perfect life waiting inside the decade he had missed.

“Would you do it differently?” he asked Nate.

Nate sat on the edge of the desk, careful not to disturb the photographs.

“Which part?”

“Our thirties.”

“Some of it.”

“Would you still meet me?”

Nate thought for a moment.

“I hope so.”

It was not the answer Preston expected.

“Hope so?”

“Preston, if we had made different choices, we might not have found ourselves in the same sandwich shop on the same night. That's what different choices mean.”

Preston looked down at the photograph of the truck.

“I don't much like that answer.”

“I know. You prefer your alternatives guaranteed.”

“Not guaranteed. Just sensible.”

Nate touched his shoulder.

“I would choose you again if I found you. But I can't promise we would find each other.”

Preston let those words settle.

There was a generosity in them he had nearly missed. Nate wasn't insisting that their history was the only possible good one. He was acknowledging that it mattered because it had happened, through circumstances neither of them could have controlled.

After a while, Nate kissed him on the temple and went to bed.

Preston remained at the desk.

He placed the photograph from the truck beside a framed picture of their wedding ceremony. In the later image, Nate looked directly at the camera while Preston looked only at him.

For years, Preston had considered that proof of how much he loved his husband.

Nate had been ready to be seen.

Preston had still been learning.

He opened the speech document once more and read the sentence he'd written that afternoon.

He moved the cursor to the end and added another line.

I never stopped to calculate what it was costing me not to be seen.

The house was quiet except for the low hum of the refrigerator and a distant car passing on the street.

Preston checked the time. Nearly midnight.

He looked at its face, then at the photographs spread across the desk.

At thirty he had been capable, ambitious, full of strength, and still young enough to take risks without imagining every mistake would become permanent. He had built a career during that decade. He had met the man he loved.

What he had not done was allow himself the whole of his own life.

If someone offered him those ten years again, he thought, he would not ask for more money or a better position.

He would ask what it felt like to stop hiding.

And he would want an honest answer, including the parts that hurt.