

## **The Ultimate Truth**

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He decided that he had had enough of the old life he had so he quit his job. The truth is he doesn't have any idea what lies ahead of him after he made this decision. It was just a spark of the moment. Having worked as an office clerk for eleven years, he really felt he needed a break. Confident that his minimal savings would last him for more than a year, he ventured into the world unknown instead of being content with the security that his work offered.

No one could really blame Melvin. He was the type who graduated college on time, started to work on time, and managed to become independent on time. He doesn't have a wife because as he reasoned out, there was no one to meet at the office except old maid Bertha who seemed not to take notice of him too. He did not take his non-existent love life as a curse but a simple problem that would be resolved in its own time. Needless to say, he patterned his old life to a time plan he himself made. There was time for everything and everything has its own time. Using the term he used in one of the books he wrote, it was a boring life.

One Friday, the last day of his stay at work, his officemates gave him gifts and even threw a small party for his early resignation. Frankly, it was for him one of the rarest occasions that happened in his days at the office. A thought came over him that it is true that people never truly value the existence of someone until that someone is gone.

He wanted his departure to be as silent as possible. Talking with his boss one afternoon, he revealed his plan of quitting work and handed out his resignation letter. Melvin's boss was reluctant to let him go. He had earned the trust of the company and stated that; "it would be a great loss for the corporation if you would go. A word of advice though, things would never be the same for you." He knew that. But that is how he wanted it; he wanted things to be different.

His best friend Mark cautioned him of being too hasty on deciding. He warned him that it would be very difficult for someone his age to find another job. When one is over thirty and at the middle of one's life, people find it unwise to go venturing into something new. They say you're too old for a new career and too old to learn something new. By that time, you are expected to stay where you are. After several futile persuasions, Mark, who also happens to be his companion at work, gave in. They agreed to meet at the bar downtown twice a month on a Friday just to exchange pleasantries.

For Melvin, the plan was simple. There was no plan! He was to have a good time. A month before he resigned, he promised himself that things would be different. This time, he would take over.

The first few weeks of his newly found life were never dull. He tried things he never did before. Things like sleeping on a morning then waking up early at night to watch television until morning. He had cable installed in his home and had "a marathon of movies moving before his eyes."

He tried painting. He would scribble images not on canvas but on the walls of his apartment. He would try sculpting using clay. He would then build a display stand, trying his hands on carpentry. He would put some of his works there. He made pottery and built objects that had no real use but he just wanted to do it. He dared not call it art but was accused of it in the future.

During the first Friday that he and Mark promised to meet, the first question his best friend asked him was, "When did you start smoking?"

The bartender asked for their order. Since Mark has to work from eight to five, sometimes eight to eight, they agreed to meet at nine o'clock and stay there until eleven. Melvin, as far as Mark knew, drinks only beer. And he can handle as much as two bottles only. You can imagine the look on his face when Melvin said, "This time I'd have tequila, then whisky, then bourbon."

They talked about how Melvin was doing and Mark kept saying how it was at the office. He would soon get the promotion promised to him with a hint that Melvin would have been in the same position if he did not resign. He talked about the raise he would get and other perks of the position. Melvin did not seem to listen. In fact, he was eyeing the dance floor.

Melvin decided to become a writer. The idea crossed his mind one day when his phonepal told him that he "could catch words in the air and make sense out of nonsense." On the long wait for the morning, Melvin found it an easy escape to talk to strangers on the phone. He met this girl who refused to reveal her real name. Instead, they created code names to hide who they really are. Melvin would call her Love Song and she would call him Blue Light. Not much significance in their code names. Blue being her favorite color and Love Song because she's the only person he can remember who sang him a song. Anyway, they just thought it was cute.

Melvin, being the impulsive person he has become, bought a computer from his savings and started to "scribble" words in the word processor. He liked it. He discovered in him an innate passion to write. It was a practical choice as he himself thought. Most of his life he typed things for other people not really writing what he wanted. More than ever, he can now put his ideas in his work plus the freedom to say what he wants.

It was an easy task for him. All he had to do was to connect things and make some sense on how they are linked. He felt the lack of restrictions from his old life. He got his ideas from observing people and making a story out of them. With this at hand, he set out with his goal, which is to create his first novel. The third Friday that Melvin and Mark met, Mark's reaction came with a question. He said, "So now you're a writer. I wonder what you'll turn up next time we meet."

But Melvin wasn't really listening. He was walking towards the dance floor. His best friend's face stared in disbelief.

The first few months flew and by this time, he had the first draft of his novel. It was about an ordinary man given extraordinary twists in life. The title was *The Spring Lies Eternal*. It was not much as he himself thought. But what made him satisfied is the contentment he has while writing this book. Being a neophyte in the publishing industry, he took the services of an old lawyer he knew back at his office days. He wasn't really worried whether it would be published or not. For him, his part has been done. Now it's time to write another book.

In just two weeks, he could not believe that some publisher actually took notice of his work. His attorney called him up so that they could arrange a meeting with the publisher. Even the negotiations were simple enough. His lawyer, who acts as his agent, would get ten percent, the publisher fifty, and to himself forty percent for every book sold. If the book would sell.

The funny thing is the publisher and his lawyer seems to be more excited than he is. He took everything in stride. For Melvin, the real pleasure lies in writing. So after two months, the book hit the market with a surprisingly warm welcome. On this event of his life, he never expected it but things would really take a huge turn.

With whatever phenomenon there was on the story he wrote, the public accepted the story with an enthusiasm unprecedented on its time. Phrases coming from the book like "What is the secret of life? You'll know it when you're dead," were very popular among students and academicians. For them, here is an author who could speak in plain language the secrets of one's existence.

Other popular lines from the book were, "If the world would stop needing love, would love cease to exist?" For many booklovers, it was also a love story set on a passion to feel, to test one's limit, and to define the thin line between illusion and reality.

There were even radio discussions on what he meant with phrases like "Life is an illusion because it is only our mind that makes out what our environment is showing," "If freedom means letting go, then we are free to feel pain. The consequence is not the end but a beginning. The start of a wonderful new feeling reminding us that we exist," and of course "The true search for God is a search for who we really are."

So was the popularity of his book that several web page were set-up on the Internet so people could freely discuss what he said. He was invited on different television programs but he declined them all. Matter of fact, he hated the attention he was getting. News around the country and some part of the globe said that there were even people who are forming a sort of a cult to answer the questions written on the novel. As one avid follower would say, "It is the sheer honesty of his work that makes us feel human." Nonetheless, he refused every move to make him more popular. His book did all that.

Melvin never questioned the wisdom Mark had. He was his friend and he knew his genuine concern for him. They were friends since their school days and the trust they have for one another was like that of brothers. On a Friday that they met, Mark gave Melvin a warm hug congratulating him on the success of his book. He said it was sure to be controversial because it was different. In fact, it contained too many people, "The Ultimate Truth." The truth that people have been searching for too long: the truth that everybody wants to hear.

He even stated that, "It's a litany of questions dying to be asked." He was just worried though. Mark was afraid to what extent the book can influence people. Melvin just at shrugged the thought. It seems he was not affected by the popularity he was getting. Until one day, with the events that happened, he himself began to feel afraid on the influence he had weaved out.

Robin was a teen-ager, a loner and someone you'd see sitting on a corner reading a book or sometimes talking to himself. He was weird. The police reports indicated that he had family problems and couldn't seem to handle the pressure. He had no real friends and his home is not the kind of place one would want to stay in. He came from a broken family.

The news spread like wildfire causing many people to think about the book Melvin wrote. The issue now revolves on whether the authorities must ban the book or prevent adolescent kids from reading it.

It was a bright sunny morning. Clutching his copy of *The Spring Lies Eternal*, Robin murdered his parents then shot himself after. On the book was an underlined phrase "Since the life we have here feels like hell, everyone would go to Heaven."

Luis was quite a normal boy. He had friends. His family came from a long line of well-respected teachers. He had everything anyone could think of to have a comfortable life. He had good looks. He has a car of his own, and his allowance was double compared to other kids his age.

At school, he was brilliant. He was also part of the soccer varsity team. On the day Luis was found hanging on his room, he had a copy of Melvin's book lying on his bed. It was open on a certain page that said, "I am fifty, but I've never been twenty. The sad thing is my mind has already been burned up before I had the freedom to use it."

And so it was decided.

Melvin's book, at first, was banned from being sold to minors. Later, certain religious groups accused him of blasphemy and urged the government to totally ban the book. It was a violation of the basic right of freedom of expression so politicians who were quick to ride on the issue said that, "Freedom entails responsibility. It is our responsibility to filter what's wrong or right for our children. Though we cannot hold the author responsible for the consequences of what he has written, at least we can do something to prevent another tragedy."

With the controversy spinning on Melvin's work, Mark agreed to meet him inside a church one Wednesday. Mark asked Melvin why he chose the church to meet him. He replied that his apartment was no longer safe for any form of conversation with so many people invading his privacy.

"So what is it that you're going to tell me," Mark inquired.

"I want a way out," said Melvin. "I never expected it to be this way. I was just minding my own business."

"I know what you mean," Mark was sighing. "Do you have any plan?"

"Yes," was the reply. "Please help me."

The last word of Melvin came out like a plea from someone who has been burdened with something that he did not deserve. Mark agreed. He said he'd take care of it and used the connections he had. He also implied that some of the people he knew are big fans of him and would be more than willing to help.

"Melvin," said Mark. "I know you more than you think I do. What is it that you're really afraid of?"

"Responsibility," was the soft answer. "All these years, I just wanted to try something different. But not this way."

"Was it the need to be heard?" his best friend asked.

"Frankly no," he was looking straight at his eyes. "It's not a deep longing to be heard; rather it's a deep longing to speak."

He continued, "When I wrote that book, all the time I was speaking with myself."

Mark was silent. Melvin still said, "I came to believe that when you want to do something passionately, you can do it. Then the world would not become a hindrance. It would help you rise up to the place where you ought to be. For me, that is the secret of life; to find your place in this world."

"I thought it was just work," Mark said.

"No," came the reply. "What I was doing was purely play. Why? Because I love my work."

A week later, a press conference was called on the sudden death of Melvin Santos, author of *The Spring Lies Eternal*. Having no relatives, his body was cremated and was given to Mark Lopez. Authorities said that it was coronary heart diseases that lead to a stroke. He left a note for Mark to read.

In front of television crews and journalists, Mark told the world of Melvin's last words:

"What may be the ultimate truth for you could be the biggest lie for me."

In a few short years, there were allegations by some people that Melvin was seen running naked on a beach in the South. At the same date that the author of *The Spring Lies Eternal* was said to have been seen, someone was using the pages of his book as toilet paper.