

THIS IS NOT A TEST, BUT WE'RE STILL FAILING



MARCIN WOJDYNA

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By Marcin Wojdyna

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Dedicated to my mum, think she would've liked it.

Prologue: The One Where We Go For a Walk

I didn't plan to visit the Museum of Failures. If you'd asked me that morning where I'd be by sunset, I might have said "working late," or "getting something done," or whatever else passes for purpose these days.

Bris trotted along beside me like he always does. He doesn't wear a lead. Never needed one; his sense of direction is better than most of the people I know. He stops when I stop. Starts when I do. When he looks up at me, it's like he's checking whether I'm still worth following.

We passed closed shops with window vinyl peeling at the corners. A busker playing a guitar in the wrong key. A drunk fighting a lamppost. A woman walking quickly past them all. Just the city as it has always been: improvising.

The museum stood between a boarded-up tanning salon and a barely surviving bakery. The facade was plain brick, the signage faded but clear: *The Museum of Failures*. No neon. No branding. Just the words, like it didn't need to explain itself.

"Looks cheerful," Bris said.

Inside, the air was cool and dry. The kind of dryness you only find in places with files and regrets. The floor tiles echoed faintly underfoot.

A sign leaned on a crooked stand beside an unmanned desk. It read: *Welcome to the Museum of Failures. Please lower your expectations accordingly.*

Bris sniffed at a potted plant that may have been artificial.

“Finally,” he muttered, “a place where disappointment isn’t hidden in the small print.”

I should have left then. Instead, I opened the door wider.

“After you,” Bris said, like it was the most normal thing in the world.

Room One: The One With the Talking Dog

I think I got Bris on a Tuesday. He showed up at my back door with a limp and a look like he'd been reading the news. I gave him water. He stayed. That was years ago.

He's an American Bully. Built like a sofa with opinions. A sentient middle finger wrapped in a fur coat. Big head, bigger heart. People judge him. He judges back.

He doesn't respond to commands. He responds to tone. And to questions, especially the ones I don't ask out loud.

He's sharp where I'm blunt, steady where I'm volatile. We're like two mismatched socks, but somehow, it works.

He talks. I talk back. No one else hears him, and I've stopped caring whether that's a problem.

There are explanations for it, I'm sure. Loneliness. Overexposure. Prolonged internal dialogue taken one step too far. But I hear him. And when I do, he always sounds exactly like himself.

I once said to him, "You're not supposed to talk."

He replied, "Neither should most people, but it doesn't stop them."

When I suggested once that I might be hallucinating him, he shrugged it off. "You spend enough time with someone, they start talking back. Whether they should or not."

Bris doesn't look impressed by much. He looks at the world like it's just missed its stop.

He's not magic. He's just a dog who's listened too long and decided to fill in the blanks.

He walked ahead of me now, deeper into the museum.

Room Two: The One With the Motivational Landfill

It started with a corridor of plaques. Quotes etched into steel, each one more ominous than the last.

- “We are building a better tomorrow.”
- “No one left behind.”
- “Believe.”

Bris paused by one with a motivational slogan beneath a photo of a landfill.

“Inspirational,” he said. “If you hate context.”

We turned into the first exhibit: Evolutionary Missteps.

A skeleton bent at impossible angles. A spine diagram labelled like a structural failure report. And a slow-motion video loop of someone falling off a treadmill trying to drink a protein shake.

Wisdom teeth. The appendix. Human ankles. All neatly catalogued with annotations like *inefficient*, *degenerate*, and *somehow still legal*.

Somewhere in the evolutionary process, we peaked and started rolling downhill. Opposable thumbs and big brains were supposed to be advantages, but all they gave us was bombs and conspiracy theories.

* * *

This is where some readers think, “Oh, this is going to be clever.”

And that’s fine.

But clever doesn’t fix things.

Clever doesn’t hold your hand when the mirror fogs.

You’re not here for clever.

Not really.

Room Three: The One With the Tactical Toaster

The Room of Inventions That Shouldn't Exist had no ambient music. Just a low mechanical hum, like the sound of a thousand discarded patents trying to be remembered.

It began with a wall of photographs: failed prototypes and proud inventors smiling beside machines that caught fire, exploded, or insulted your mother in twelve languages.

The first display was a hairdryer/toaster combo. The sign beneath it read: *Morning efficiency, terminal risk.*

"Health and safety must have taken a long lunch," I said.

Bris sniffed it cautiously. "Or they tried it first."

Next came a smart fridge that could judge your grocery choices. It lit up when we walked past and said, "Really? Again?" in a disappointed American accent. Bris growled softly.

There was a wearable coffee brewer, a Bluetooth-enabled fork that tweeted each bite, and a juice machine that required a subscription to work. Most had been crowdfunded. All had been returned.

An entire alcove was dedicated to weaponised leisure: razor scooters with flamethrowers, drones that played trap music, a self-balancing hoverboard made entirely of glass. The notes on their safety reports had been redacted, most likely with fire.

At the centre of the room stood a man-shaped mannequin dressed in an electric heating jacket that had been recalled for setting two people on fire and mildly shocking a third. A nearby video showed its creator defending the design choice on morning television.

“What’s the actual threshold for invention?” I asked.

Bris cocked his head. “A credit card and a lack of supervision.”

In a corner sat a single chair labelled: *The idea generator*. The sign read: *Sit down. Think hard. See if you do any better.*

I didn’t sit.

We passed a bin full of wireless chargers, digital paperweights, and one robotic dog that kept trying to lick Bris’s tail.

He did not respond well.

The exit was under a banner that said: *Because we could, not because we should.*

We followed it out without touching anything. Not even the voice-activated umbrella that kept asking for feedback.

Room Four: The One With the Holy Misfires

We turned the corner and walked straight into stained glass.

Light poured through it like someone had set a cathedral on fire and decided to leave the windows intact. Saints. Sinners. Heroes. Heretics. All beaming politely from jagged panels, frozen mid-miracle or mid-murder, depending on which century you preferred.

The room was titled: The Department of Religious Mishaps.

Bris instantly rolled his eyes.

“If you want to know where we went wrong,” I said, “look no further than the first hominid that decided to pray.

“Some early primate looked up at a storm, got scared, and instead of finding shelter or learning how lightning worked, it decided to worship the sky. That was the moment we lost. That was the moment intelligence took a backseat to superstition, and we never recovered.”

I leaned back and kept going.

“We’ve come further than any species before us ever did,” I added.

We split the atom to give us the power of the sun, sent probes to the bottom of the ocean and beyond the edge of our solar system, and not once did we find a god. No throne. No light. Nothing watching. Just silence.

“And still, billions cling to the idea of an old man in the sky, beard length adjusted for cultural preference. Every religion claims to be the peaceful one, yet religion ranks among disease, famine, war, and natural disasters as one of humanity’s most consistent killers. Religious wars? Grown-ass adults fighting over whose imaginary friend is better.

“The fact that it still controls laws, policies and personal lives is an evolutionary failure. Give monkeys another shot, and they’d probably get it right next time,” I concluded.

Bris snorted. “Monkeys don’t need organised guilt to act decent.”

We continued toward a wall of confession booths that had been retrofitted into audio stations. Each one played a loop of humanity asking for forgiveness and then promptly repeating the behaviour. A sign on one read: *Please insert soul. No refunds provided.*

In the corner, a golden ATM blessed donations over £100.

Across from me, a touchscreen exhibit let visitors assemble their own belief system by dragging and dropping concepts like Redemption, Afterlife, and Dress Codes. It crashed after three selections.

At the centre of the room stood a sculpture: abstract, multi-limbed, impossible to name. The plaque beneath it read: *Still pending final interpretation.*

Bris curled up beside it, unimpressed.

“People always want something to believe in,” I said.

“They should try gravity,” he replied. “It’s consistent and requires no sacrifices.”

One wall was a timeline of sectarian wars. The border disputes. The holy lands. The pious justifications. The artistic renderings of divine vengeance, always somehow validating whoever painted them.

There were artefacts, too:

- A silver goblet used in a massacre.
- A translation of a translation of a translation of a prophecy.
- A hand-stitched banner with blood on both sides.
- A gold-plated megaphone once used to condemn disco.
- A sandal, allegedly touched by the pope’s cousin’s neighbour.

I stood in front of a digital mirror that overlaid halos, horns, or indifference depending on your posture. Mine flickered between all three.

“Do you believe in anything?” Bris asked.

“No,” I said. “In fact, I have so little faith in humanity that I look both ways on a one-way street.”

The exit was labelled *Faith-based outcomes*. The arrow beneath it pointed in two directions.

We chose the one with less incense.

* * *

You're still here?

Interesting.

Some people skip this one. They think religion's a touchy subject.

Others highlight it and pretend it changed their worldview, right before they buy scented prayer candles on sale.

If you're the former, we laugh at you.

If you're the latter, we laugh at you too.

Room Five: The One With the Invisible Hand

The Economic Disaster Exhibit was three rooms wide and somehow still too small. A dull brass plaque welcomed us with the words: *Please mind the gap between the theory and reality.*

Bris looked at the floor tiles, which were shaped like coins. Some were cracked. One was missing entirely. He stepped around them like they were conceptually contagious.

A hologram of a smiling economist looped endlessly on a screen near the entrance. Behind him, a graph soared optimistically upwards. The caption underneath read: *Projected growth in executive bonuses (during crisis conditions).*

“Is this satire?” I asked.

Bris glanced up at the screen. “If it is, it’s impressively expensive.”

The room was organised like a casino designed by someone with an MBA and a grudge. Roulette tables featuring housing bubbles. Slot machines themed around austerity measures. A claw machine that dropped its prize every time it got close. That one’s probably by design.

At the centre stood a rotating model of Earth, covered in Monopoly money and real estate foreclosure signs. A nearby touchscreen invited us to *balance the global economy*. It froze as soon as I selected *redistribute wealth*.

There were shelves of defunct currencies in glass boxes, carefully labelled with their hyperinflation dates and most recent conspiracy theories. Zimbabwean dollars. Venezuelan bolívars. Cryptocurrency wallets that had lost everything except their smugness.

“Do you think money was ever real?” I asked.

Bris looked at a golden toilet labelled *Executive perks (expenses approved)*.

“Only to the people who never had to think about it.”

We walked past a section on trickle-down economics. It featured a series of fountains, each one dry except the top. The final display was just a mirror labelled *Consumer confidence*. It was slightly warped.

Bris sniffed and kept walking. I lingered, just long enough to read the last line on the wall: *In the end, everyone was too big to fail. So they failed together.*

We left through a revolving door that spun a little too easily. It dropped us into a corridor lined with golden arrows pointing in no particular direction.

Room Six: The One Where the Share Price Smiled

It was too bright in this one.

Not the natural kind. Fluorescent. Retail bright. The kind of light that makes you feel guilty for thinking instead of purchasing.

The walls were made to look like brushed aluminium. Modern. Polished. Cold. As if even the decor had undergone a cost-benefit analysis and empathy didn't make the cut.

Bris stopped beside a touchscreen terminal asking for a fingerprint before offering *targeted insights*.

"I don't have one of those," he said.

"Neither do corporations," I muttered. "And they're people now."

The first display showed stock charts. All upward. Beneath each was a plaque explaining what was cut, closed, or destroyed to make the line rise. Schools, healthcare, pensions, habitats. One was simply labelled *Time off*.

There was a section on company slogans that had evolved over decades. From *We care* to *We comply* to *We apologise for the inconvenience, but profits have increased*.

An exhibit labelled *Innovation vs. Cost* displayed prototypes of sustainable packaging and living wages. Every single one was crossed out with a red pen that said: *Not scalable*.

Bris eyed a tax haven globe that spun slowly on its axis.

“Is this entire room sarcasm?” he asked.

“No,” I said. “That would require someone to feel self-conscious.”

In a corner, a small theatre played ads on loop: emotionally manipulative, politically neutral, algorithmically perfect. Happy families holding products, smiling workers thanking billionaires for the opportunity to survive.

I stood in front of a plaque that read: *The invisible hand gives, then takes, then sells back at 18 per cent interest.*

Bris stared at a golden briefcase chained to a pedestal. Inside it was a single bar of soap labelled *Accountability*.

There was a feedback wall near the exit. Visitors were invited to write what they’d lost. Family time. Healthcare. A sense of meaning. The pen didn’t work.

We left through an automatic door that whispered *Thank you for your loyalty* as it opened. Bris rolled his eyes. I didn’t bother. I was already walking.

Room Seven: The One With the Cough Heard Round the World

The Pandemic Quarter was quieter than the others. Not out of respect. More out of fatigue.

It opened with a long corridor of mirrors, each fogged slightly, as if they had recently breathed. Above them, a plaque read: *You were here too*. That felt more like a threat than an observation.

Bris sneezed as we entered. Loudly.

“That better not be irony,” I said.

“Just dust,” he replied, though he stepped more carefully after that.

The room was divided into zones, each representing a different outbreak. Plague. Cholera. Flu. HIV. Covid-19. A looped recording of a newscaster played in the background, their voice blurred into static.

On the left: display cases of masks. Some medical. Some cloth. One made of sequins. Another hand-stitched with the phrase *Don't tell me what to do* in cursive.

On the right: a touchscreen showing lockdown timelines. *Swipe left to close borders. Swipe right to reopen pubs.*

At the centre was a life-sized sculpture: a family standing two metres apart at a dinner table. Plates full. Faces blank. The tag read: *Together, apart (2020–Whenever)*.

Bris eyed a sanitiser dispenser shaped like a religious relic.

“We were told to stay home to save lives,” I said.

“And then we were told to go shopping to save the economy,” he replied.

A chart on the wall compared public health funding to military budgets. Below it, a taped-up sign read: *Please don't cough on the exhibits.*

There was a corner filled with denial: books titled *It's Just a Cold*, T-shirts with slogans, a video loop of an influencer licking a toilet bowl for views.

“I remember thinking we'd change after all this,” I said.

Bris stopped and looked at me. “You did. Just not in the way you meant.”

We moved on. The next room smelled faintly of detergent and something older. Something like forgetting.

I tried to place it, but the smell slid away; Bris didn't chase it either, as if we'd agreed not to remember.

Room Eight: The One With the Unforced Errors

The entrance is quiet. No queue, no welcome sign, no background music. Just a narrow doorway and a carpet that changes halfway through, like the museum stopped caring about it years ago.

The first wall holds Conversations You Should Have Started. Letters that were never sent, numbers on scraps of paper where the ink has smudged away. A voicemail that begins with someone saying your name and then hanging up.

On the other side, Visits You Kept Putting Off. Photographs of people on doorsteps, waiting. Some are holding flowers. Some are holding hands. None of them are here anymore.

Bris walks ahead and stops in front of a display called Things You Said To End An Argument Faster. Sentences written on plain white cards. The shortest is just one word: *Fine*. Others read *It's nothing* and *I'll be there next time*. He looks at me. I look away.

Further on, a case marked Gifts Bought But Never Given. A paperback with the receipt still inside. A scarf folded neatly, the tag tucked between its stitches. A jar of marmalade with a label in handwriting I recognise but do not touch.

In the centre of this space is a room on its own. A single chair facing a microphone. The sign says *The exact moment you should have said something*. There is no audio. Only the sense that you have been here before, in other rooms, with other chances.

Bris stays in the doorway.

“You could,” he says.

“It would not change anything.”

“Maybe not for you.”

The exit corridor is lined with glass cases under dim light. Inside each is a small, ordinary object. A baby’s shoe. A train ticket. A phone with a single message draft on the screen. Every label begins with the same words: *You meant to*.

Room Nine: The One With the Infinite Scroll

The entrance to the exhibit was a glowing tunnel of screens, each one flickering with images from the last decade: selfies, riots, dog filters, conspiracy threads, and influencer apologies delivered with perfect lighting and not an ounce of shame.

“Brace yourself,” I said.

Bris sneezed. “Smells like broadband and burnout.”

We stepped inside.

The first display was a giant touchscreen that wouldn’t stop refreshing. It replayed trending topics in reverse chronological order: scandals, memes, uprisings, cancellations, and things people cared deeply about for precisely 36 hours.

A timeline on the wall tracked the rise of platforms, from connection tools to behavioural experiments. Each phase came with a sample headline:

- “Social Media Brings People Together!”
- “Social Media Divides Nations!”
- “Social Media is Monetising Everything!”

One room was a looped simulation of comment sections. Each new post brought argument, escalation, and someone shouting about free speech before rage-quitting. The smell of burnt dopamine hung faintly in the air. Next to your mother. And Hitler.

We passed a wall titled Microdoses of Outrage. It displayed framed tweets that led to actual legislation, violence, or brand partnerships.

“Do you think it was meant to be this destructive?” I asked.

“It was meant to be addictive,” Bris said. “Destructive was a feature, not a bug.”

We found the Influencer Shrine: ring lights, discarded PR boxes, and a small mountain of unopened skincare samples. A digital counter ticked upward with every new “sorry if you were offended” apology video uploaded to the cloud.

Bris stared at a 3D-printed sculpture of a woman crying on camera titled: *Authenticity (Includes paid promotion)*.

“Are you alright?” I asked.

Bris let out a slow exhale. “Every person carries around a device with access to the totality of human knowledge, and yet people are constantly wrong about everything.”

“Impressive, in a bleak sort of way,” I muttered. “If Shakespeare wrote a play today, it’d be about social media and called *Much A-Say About Nothing*.”

The exit was a blank white screen. When you stood in front of it, it showed your face: filtered, flattened, hashtagged.

A button beneath read: *Like*.

We didn’t press it.

Room Ten: The One With the Science Fiction That Became Science Fact

The sign outside is styled like a cinema poster. Glossy, with a tagline underneath: *The future is now*. Only someone has crossed out *now* and written *worse*.

The first room is bright and sterile. A display called *Homes that learned too much* shows a row of speaker devices, each with a thin red light glowing at its centre. A screen on the wall lists what they have recorded: coughs, arguments, whispered secrets. Bris watches the list scroll, ears twitching.

“Do they hear us now?” he asks.

“Probably.”

He stares at the nearest speaker. “Then stop narrating.”

Next is *Dreams of space*. Models of rockets hang from the ceiling, but each one carries a tiny plaque with the name of the billionaire who owned it. One is gold-plated. Another is shaped in a way that makes Bris raise an eyebrow, then refuse to comment. The launch footage plays on a loop, each clip ending with the same view: a window looking back at Earth, followed by a press conference about how life-changing it all was.

We pass into a smaller room marked *Artificial minds*. Screens flicker with endless pages of text. Recipes that could never work. Poems that read like washing machine manuals. Articles about events that never happened. A display case holds a headset labelled *For creative work*, the label beneath it reading *Out of order*.

The last exhibit is in a darkened corner: *The cities we imagined*. Neon skylines. Flying cars. Street levels scrubbed clean by invisible forces. Then the next panel shows the reality: broken pavements, self-driving delivery robots, and adverts for payday loans beamed across entire building faces.

At the far end, an exit sign flickers above a sliding door. It opens with a low hiss, like it wants to sound futuristic but is tired of the effort. Bris steps through first.

“Is it me,” he says, “or does the past sound more fun than this?”

“It’s not you.”

Room Eleven: The One With the Smoking Planet

The Room of Environmental Crimes smelled like burnt plastic and citrus-scented regret. The lighting was dim, as if the bulbs were powered by guilt alone.

A projection filled the far wall: forest, then flames. Ocean, then sludge. A polar bear stared directly at the camera before fading into a bar chart.

Bris looked up at the ceiling fan slowly rotating above us. “Feels breezy,” he said. “Like the calm before a thousand storms.”

We started with the plastics exhibit: disposable everything, arranged into a timeline of convenience. Straws, wrappers, bottle caps, all perfectly preserved in a block of resin labelled *Permanent solutions to temporary problems*.

A graph next to it tracked emissions since the Industrial Revolution. It was shaped like a hockey stick. The audio commentary sounded tired.

An installation in the centre featured a tree surrounded by screens showing corporate pledges: carbon neutral by 2040, sustainable packaging by 2050, ethical intentions by the next press cycle.

I squinted at the fine print. “All targets, no substance.”

Bris tilted his head. “All performance, no shame.”

There was a sandbox simulation labelled *Build your own planetary collapse*. It let you adjust variables like population, consumption, and regulation. Every configuration led to the same result: rising water and the sound of sirens.

We moved past an oil rig model pumping out crude onto a tiny plastic coastline. The nearby plaque read: *Accidents will continue to happen*.

“Do you think we ever had a chance?” I asked.

Bris walked beside a melting model of the Greenland ice sheet.

“Not once we decided denial was cheaper than change.”

At the end of the room, a child’s drawing hung on the wall. Blue skies. Trees. A sun with sunglasses. It had been crossed out in red biro and replaced with the word *Soon*.

We left without speaking. The exit was through a revolving door that creaked like it knew we weren’t coming back.

Room Twelve: The One With Too Much and Not Enough

The Great Hunger Exhibit was cold. Not just in temperature. In atmosphere.

It opened with two glass cases placed side by side.

One held a perfectly preserved supermarket meal deal: sandwich, crisps, soft drink. The other held a cracked bowl, empty but for dust.

Above them, a sign read: *Supply meets demand. Just not equally.*

Bris paused beside a projected map showing global crop yields next to poverty zones. Bright green overlapped dark red in too many places.

“Efficient, isn’t it?” I said.

“In the same way a guillotine is efficient,” he replied.

A corridor of ration cards led to a video installation titled *Planned obsolescence, unplanned starvation*. It looped footage of surplus destruction: milk poured away, crops burned, pallets of bread left to rot behind locked gates.

Next to it, a screen showed charity adverts on one half and supermarket loyalty scheme ads on the other. They looked disturbingly similar.

Someone had crossed out “natural disaster” in biro and replaced it with “excuse”.

One exhibit let visitors spin a wheel labelled *Causes of hunger*. Every spin landed on:

- *Profit margins*
- *Policy failure*
- *Indifference*

Bris sniffed a stack of reports titled *Feeding the Future*. Most were unopened. One had been used to prop up a digital scale balancing coins against calories.

We passed a table piled high with discarded packaging. The screen above it blinked: *How to waste responsibly*.

“You ever wonder why people don’t revolt?” I asked.

“Too tired,” Bris said. “Too full. Depends where you’re standing.”

The final display was a wall of faces, each with their name, age, and the words: *Food insecure*. The room had no music. Just the faint hum of a vending machine that had eaten someone’s last coin and given nothing back.

We left in silence. The exit was a revolving door stuck halfway open, like it wasn’t sure which way we were meant to go.

* * *

“They’re getting quieter,” I said.

“Fatigue,” Bris replied. “Museum’s long. So’s life.”

“Think they’ll stick around?”

“They made it past the Economic Disaster Exhibit. That’s a sign of commitment. Or numbness.”

Either way, thanks.

We know you’re not reading this at a desk with perfect lighting and a mug of intellectual ambition.

You’re reading it between two tabs, or on the loo, or just long enough to avoid your inbox.

That counts.

Room Thirteen: The One With All the Red Flags

The hallway into the gallery was painted in hazard yellow, the kind used on chemical barrels and nuclear signage. It was probably a joke. Probably.

A low siren played softly overhead. Not an emergency one. More the kind that says “this is fine” in a tone that absolutely isn’t.

Bris stopped at the threshold.

“Smells like a bad decision,” he said.

We walked in.

The first wall was dedicated entirely to books. *Silent Spring*, 1984, *The Uninhabitable Earth*, *Your Brain on the Internet*, and *Why Pandemics Keep Happening (And Why We Keep Acting Surprised)*.

Below each, a footnote. Sales figures. Film adaptations. Number of world leaders who skimmed them before doing the opposite.

A looped video montage played nearby, showing protestors, whistleblowers, and data analysts shouting into microphones while no one listened. At the end of the video, a single phrase appeared in twelve languages:

We did try to warn you.

Bris sat down in front of a cracked TV set playing climate reports from the 1980s. A cartoon penguin wore sunglasses while standing on a thinning piece of ice.

I wandered over to a timeline of catastrophic policy reversals. Paper-thin charts displayed U-turns, walk-backs and denials. One rotating sculpture labelled *The circle of blame* spun endlessly in a loop with a single light bouncing between four words: Media. Science. Public. Politics.

“We always knew,” I said. “Problem is, the moral high horse still shits everywhere.”

An installation titled *Too little, too late* displayed a sequence of headlines issued days after irreversible decisions. They included quotes like “Experts Were Surprised” and “Unexpected Side Effects Include Everything.”

In a darkened alcove was a pile of unopened letters. All warnings. All sent. None acknowledged. The sign simply read: *Unread*.

Bris nudged one with his nose.

“It’s not that we didn’t know,” I said.

He looked up at me.

“It’s that we knew and wanted to be right anyway.”

We left through a side door marked: *Evacuation route (blocked)*. The arrow beneath it pointed in both directions. Neither looked promising.

Room Fourteen: The One With the Democracy Detour

The Hall of Political Buffoonery was carpeted in red, white, and varying shades of regret.

We entered beneath a stone archway etched with the phrase: *Leadership is temporary. Embarrassment is archived.*

Bris stopped to inspect a bronze statue of a grinning man shaking hands with himself.

“Is that...?” I began.

“Yes,” Bris said. “Twice elected. Three times indicted.”

The walls were covered with campaign posters from across time and ideology. Each one featured a slogan that had aged like milk. Promises of peace followed by declarations of war. Fiscal responsibility beside golden bathtubs. One poster read simply: *Trust me*, next to a mugshot.

There was a touchscreen quiz titled Dictator or Motivational Speaker? I scored 40 per cent. Bris scored higher.

The main room featured podiums under spotlights, each playing soundbites from history’s loudest mistakes. Some blustered. Some rambled. One just shouted “Fake news!” repeatedly until it short-circuited.

At the back, an animatronic parliament bickered with itself. Occasionally it collapsed into laughter. Occasionally it just collapsed.

Between a cracked portrait of a leader's jawline and a map of gerrymanders hung a small reproduction of van Klomp's *Fallen Madonna with Big Boobies*. The plaque read: *Looted, lost, found, argued over. Microfilm not included.*

Bris barely glanced at it. "Same tricks, new uniforms," he said, and kept walking.

One exhibit was a reconstruction of a debate stage: microphones turned off, each podium equipped with a rotating apology generator. Visitors could press a button and receive statements like "What I meant was..." and "That wasn't the full context."

"Is this where things got out of hand?" I asked.

Bris raised an eyebrow. "You mean after the kings and before the clowns?"

The exit was guarded by a wax figure of a populist leader pointing in every direction.

Bris stared at it.

"He looks familiar," I said.

"They all do," he replied.

We exited through a revolving door labelled *Next term pending*. It spun without resistance. Too easily.

* * *

You skimmed a little.

We get it. Politics is exhausting.

The same faces. The same speeches. The same avoidable catastrophes dressed up in national colours.

But if you skimmed over the part where they cheered after the treaty signing, go back.

That was important.

Room Fifteen: The One With the Confident Mistakes

The air in this room was colder. Not just the temperature but something clinical. As if doubt had been scrubbed out with bleach.

We entered through a doorway shaped like a microscope lens. A plaque overhead read: *In hypothesis we trusted.*

Bris immediately stepped around a life-sized bust of a Victorian doctor holding a bone saw and smiling far too much.

“He looks thrilled,” I said.

“History was not kind to him,” Bris replied. “But he earned it.”

The exhibits were laid out in chronological order. First: trepanation, humourism, leeches. A wall chart explained how imbalance of bile once justified everything from migraines to witch hunts.

Then came the enlightenment, where certainty dressed up as progress. Phrenology heads lined one shelf. Lobotomy tools on another. A brass electrotherapy machine buzzed faintly with restored electricity. It offered cures for hysteria, grief, and female independence.

One display featured a glowing screen that played archived documentaries titled *The Future of Genetics*, intercut with marketing clips from diet pills, eugenics propaganda, and those 1950s films about atomic happiness.

Bris sat in front of a smoking pipe sealed behind glass. The caption read: *Endorsed by nine out of ten doctors (before we noticed the death).*

A table displayed a list of food trends: margarine good, margarine bad, eggs bad, eggs fine, gluten dangerous, gluten fine, kale divine. A loop of changing headlines scrolled in the background, set to a soundtrack of exhausted scientists asking to be left alone.

I paused at a display titled *Medical experiments without consent*. It included photographs. Documents. Too many apologies issued decades too late.

Bris looked up. “We always say we didn’t know. But we did. We just didn’t stop.”

There was a guestbook near the exit. Its header read: *What have we learned?* Every page beneath was blank.

We left without signing. There didn’t seem to be much point.

Room Sixteen: The One With All the Ridiculous Rules

The entrance to The Legislative Hall of Why? was styled like a courtroom but with inflatable gavels hanging from the ceiling.

Inside, the walls were lined with outdated and overreaching statutes, printed on aged parchment and laminated placards. Some were highlighted for emphasis. Others were annotated with what could only be described as very polite disbelief.

Bris immediately trotted over to a display labelled *The historical section: Laws from when we still blamed witches.*

“You’re not going to like this one,” he said.

The scrolls detailed laws banning public sneezing after sunset, forbidding the wearing of purple unless you were royalty, and fining bakers who made their loaves “too light-hearted.”

We moved on.

The modern section was somehow worse. Legislation banning dancing in certain towns. Laws requiring permits to collect rainwater. Restrictions on how long a sandwich could legally be left unattended in a public park.

“Did nobody stop to ask why?” I asked.

Bris shrugged. “Some people make laws the way toddlers build towers. Because they can. Until it falls over.”

There was an interactive exhibit titled *You are now under arrest*. Visitors could be charged with smiling too widely during a passport photo, transporting a salmon in suspicious circumstances, or carrying a ladder without a compelling alibi.

Next came the international corner: chewing gum bans, fines for wearing high heels in historic cities, jail time for insulting livestock. Each nation had its own glass case of bureaucracy. Each one more absurd than the last.

A sign hung over all of it: *Order without understanding*.

Bris sniffed a laminated sign that read: *No dogs allowed*.

“Ironic,” I said.

“Illegal,” he muttered. “Technically.”

We left through a revolving door labelled: *In case of emergency, fill out form A38 and wait for a Tuesday*.

It took three spins to find the exit.

Room Seventeen: The One With the Glitter and Geopolitics

We weren't meant to find this room. It was behind a velvet curtain, next to a malfunctioning smoke machine and a poster that read: *Unity through performance (terms and conditions apply)*.

Bris hesitated.

"This feels like a trap," he said.

"It feels like a televote," I replied.

We stepped inside.

A massive LED wall cycled through decades of performances: sequins, pyrotechnics, key changes, politically neutral smiles. Flags waved. Fireworks popped. Somewhere in the distance, a woman in a glittery jumpsuit sang about peace while her government starved the citizens of a neighbouring country to death.

One wall featured a map of voting patterns: clusters of neighbours giving each other top marks regardless of talent. Small arrows stabbed across borders. Every connection pulsed in familiar loops. The caption read: *Diplomacy in four-four time*.

A touch display let us replay iconic controversies: banned flags, protest stunts, "technical difficulties," and one moment where the wrong winner was nearly announced because the host panicked.

Bris sat under a disco ball labelled *Soft power, loud chorus*.

“Does anyone win this?” I asked.

“They all do,” Bris said. “And they all lose. That’s the point.”

There was a fashion archive in the back: platforms, latex, holographic fabrics that could be seen from orbit. A mannequin wore a suit made entirely of currency symbols and LED tears.

A small theatre ran a looping film titled *We Sang, So We Must Be Good Now*. It featured commentary from smiling politicians over images of cultural unity, backdropped by refugee camps and border fences.

At the end of the room was a scoreboard. Every number was a ten. Every country had voted. Everyone was cheering.

The fine print underneath said: *Narratives may differ. Content may not reflect reality. Batteries not included.*

Bris and I stood beneath a waving digital flag made entirely of sound waves.

Then we left. Slowly, past the confetti cannon and through a door shaped like a peace sign, painted over bulletproof glass.

It was hard to tell which side of it we were meant to be on; Bris seemed to think the question didn’t matter.

Room Eighteen: The One Where the Mirror Fogged Up

The room was nearly empty.

At first glance, it looked like a corridor between more important exhibits. No touchscreen. No voiceover. Just silence and a single object placed dead centre.

A mirror.

Full length. Plain frame. No clever signage. Just a small note at the base that said: *Please remain still.*

Bris stopped three steps in.

“I hate these,” he muttered.

“Why?”

“Because they work.”

I approached. The surface was clean, too clean. It reflected everything with brutal accuracy. My hair. My posture. The slight frown that had settled into permanent residency. The look of someone expecting to see something symbolic and only finding themselves.

For a moment, nothing happened. Then the lights dimmed and words began to appear in soft projection across the mirror’s surface. Not slogans. Not historical facts. Questions.

- *When did you last intervene?*
- *When did you last care beyond the headline?*
- *How long did the anger last before you moved on?*

Bris sat down behind me. I could see him in the reflection, calm as ever.

“You think this is fair?” I asked.

“Fair doesn’t come into it,” he said.

Another message appeared: *This is not guilt. This is a reminder.*

Below that: *The world was never changed by understanding alone.*

I looked at myself again. Just me. Still breathing. Still pretending that noticing things counted for something.

Bris padded closer. His reflection blinked slowly. “You don’t need to do everything,” he said. “But you need to stop doing nothing.”

There were no other doors out. Just a narrow hallway that led back the way we came, looping us forward into the next exhibit.

We walked on. Neither of us said much after that.

* * *

Did you pause? We hope you paused.

The mirror doesn't judge. It reflects. That's worse.

We hope you saw something in it.

Even if it was just your screen glare and that look you make
when pretending not to feel implicated.

The One Where Bris Disappears

He was just... gone.

One moment he was beside me, sniffing a suspiciously vintage display about sustainable packaging in wartime, and the next? Nothing. No tail. No echo of footsteps. Just a Bris-shaped absence and a gut-wrenching silence I refused to label as concern.

“Bris?”

Nothing.

I backtracked through three exhibits, retraced my own emotional spiral, checked behind a curtain marked *Staff Only* and briefly considered asking one of the museum’s information kiosks, but thought better of it.

“Seriously?”

Still nothing.

I sat on a bench near *The Exhibit of Optimism in Nineteenth-Century Political Pamphlets* and waited. I wasn’t panicking. Definitely not. I was... processing.

Five full minutes passed. Then ten. Then I started to wonder if this was the part where the museum tested your resolve; where it removed what you loved and waited to see if you’d still care without it.

Bris had vanished like a ghost, and the emptiness felt heavier than I expected.

Somewhere in the back of my mind, Laika's story flickered in my brain: sent into the void with no promise of return, a brave soul lost to ambition's cold calculation. I wondered if Bris felt that weight, too. Maybe disappearance wasn't just absence. It was sacrifice.

And then, as suddenly as he vanished, Bris returned.

He walked in from the opposite corridor, tail high, face neutral, like he'd just completed a task of great moral importance.

I stared at him. "Where the hell did you go?"

He shrugged. "Had to take a shit. Did it in The Fascist Hall."

"You what?"

"Right next to a statue of Mussolini. Felt appropriate."

This fucking dog.

I wanted to scold him. Or congratulate him. I couldn't decide which.

"Some cat watched me the whole time. Looked properly pissed off, like he was planning to do it first."

"There's a cat in here?"

"Yeah. Might be part of the museum. Might be the actual curator."

We walked on in silence, the smell of disobedience trailing faintly behind us.

Sometimes protest isn't a speech. Sometimes it's biological.

Sometimes it's just Bris, doing what needed to be done.

We passed the cat again near the gift shop. This time it was mid-stare-down with a taxidermied raccoon. It looked like it was winning.

Room Twenty: The One Where I Tried to Explain It to the Dog

We must have wandered off the formal route. There was no signage, no exhibit number, just a quiet room with worn carpet, a sagging bench, and a vending machine stocked entirely with different brands of still water.

Bris jumped onto the bench and curled into himself like a seasoned traveller between disappointments.

I sat beside him. The silence pressed in like a coat two sizes too heavy.

“This is probably the part where I’m supposed to reflect,” I said.

He didn’t answer. He had that look again: he stared at me like I was an idiot. This happens often.

“You ever think none of it means anything?”

Nothing.

“Like, we invent structure so the screaming has something to echo off of. Birth, job, mortgage, Netflix, taxes, small talk. End. That’s the full cycle, isn’t it?”

Still nothing. He blinked once. Possibly in judgment.

“I mean, what’s the point of anything if everyone forgets it five minutes later and half of them are too distracted to care in the first place?”

Bris yawned.

“Not helping.”

I rubbed the back of my neck. The vending machine made a soft whirring noise, like it too was trying to avoid getting involved.

“I’m not saying I want an answer. I just want the questions to stop multiplying. I want there to be a version of life that isn’t held together with caffeine, coping mechanisms, and Google searches like *how to feel better without trying too hard*.”

Bris lifted his head.

“Have you tried not thinking so much?” he said.

“I’m genuinely not sure that’s an option at this point. I swung by the GP earlier and picked up my anxiety meds. There’s this plant in the waiting room: big leafy bastard, sits in the corner like it’s seen things. Looked more at peace than I’ve ever managed.”

He rested his chin on his paws again. “Well, try harder.”

We sat in silence for a while after that.

It wasn’t peace. But it was a pause. Sometimes, that’s the best version of meaning you can get.

The lights flickered once, very slightly. Bris stood up, stretched, and nodded toward the corridor ahead.

“Come on,” he said. “There’s more failure waiting.”

Of course there was.

Room Twenty-One: The One Where the Wrong People Got the Applause

The room shimmered with the kind of polished prestige that smells faintly of backdated awards and clean shame.

Bris paused at the threshold.

“Smells like ego and erasure,” he said.

On one side: golden plaques, trophies, statues. Names carved in proud font, each one footnoted with a smaller, quieter truth: *Actually, someone else did this first.*

There were displays dedicated to the world’s most famous misattributions:

- *The telephone? Not Bell.*
- *The lightbulb? Not Edison.*
- *The electric car? Definitely not Elon-fucking-Musk.*

Each case was a monument to influence winning over invention. The plaques were clean. The timelines weren’t.

Bris sniffed a particularly tall trophy engraved *Innovation of the Year*, the card below it reading: *First proposed three years earlier by someone denied a grant.*

“Do you think they knew?” I asked.

“They always know,” Bris said. “They just have better lawyers.”

We moved deeper, and the gold turned to grey.

The opposite wall held a series of empty chairs. Dozens of them. Each with a nameplate most people wouldn't recognise. Scientists. Writers. Inventors. Visionaries. The ones who got it right too early, or too quietly, or without a blue tick.

Above each chair was a mirror. When you looked into it, a soft phrase appeared: *Would you have listened?*

Some displays had half-finished notebooks. Others had rejection letters. One was just a torn photograph with the caption: *Forgotten on purpose.*

One chair sat beyond the labelled ones. A paperback rested on the seat, spine cracked, title barely legible: *The Farewell Fare*. No author listed. No plaque. Just a note: *File corrupted. Context unavailable. Possibly fiction.*

I reached for it.

Bris growled.

"Let it be," he said. "That one's still bleeding."

I left it where it was, and turned back toward the wall behind me.

I watched the exhibit cycle through headlines. The applause given too late. The fame misdirected. The interviews where someone smiled politely and took credit for a life's work they barely understood.

"They were right early," Bris said. "That's worse than being wrong late."

At the far end of the room stood a single golden bust, smiling proudly. The caption read: *Public recognition*. The line beneath it had been scratched out. Someone had replaced it with: *Visibility is not the same as value*.

The exit sign flickered above the door. Its caption read: *You may now applaud*.

We didn't.

Room Twenty-Two: The One Where Everyone Got It Wrong

This exhibit was laid out like a supermarket, which felt appropriate. Neatly labelled. Overly lit. Selling confidence by the shelf.

We entered beneath a neon arch that read: *The future, as imagined incorrectly.*

Bris trotted ahead, ears perked. “Smells like certainty. And hair gel.”

The first display featured old magazine covers: “Flying Cars by 2000!” “We’ll All Work Three-Hour Days!” “Paper Will Be Obsolete!” Each one paired with a photo of the actual year: gridlocked traffic, overworked delivery drivers, and a man shouting at a printer that jammed for the fifth time.

Next came a library of quotes from economists, futurists, and political strategists. Each was timestamped, signed, and entirely wrong.

- “This War Will Be Over By Christmas.”
- “No One Will Ever Need More Than 640KB Of Memory.”
- “Housing Prices Will Stabilise.”

Every prediction had a correction beneath it, dated just long enough after the damage to be completely useless.

Bris stopped at a spinning wheel labelled *Tech promises that failed to launch*. He pawed it. It landed on “Hyperloop.”

“Too fast, too fragile,” he said.

“Story of the species,” I replied.

A nearby touchscreen let us generate our own doomed forecast. I typed in: *We will finally learn from history*. The system blinked, then crashed.

I sighed. “Every era feels like déjà vu. Another time loop of bad choices, no plot twist in sight, humanity’s shortcomings laid bare, while we keep pretending grit in the wound means the oyster is making us a pearl.”

There was a fashion section displaying speculative trends: chrome jumpsuits, edible clothing, neural hats. None had caught on.

At the far end of the aisle stood a cardboard cutout of a grinning weatherman beside a hurricane. His finger pointed at the wrong coast.

The final wall was reserved for prophecies: religious, secular, corporate. Beneath each: a small printed sticker. *Still waiting*.

“I wonder if anyone ever guessed this place,” I said.

Bris gave me a look. “Museum for the stuff we got wrong?”

“Exactly.”

He sat. “Only every writer ever.”

We left through a door made of prediction market receipts and torn horoscopes. It sighed shut behind us.

Room Twenty-Three: The One With the Branded Irony

It was the most well-lit room in the museum.

Of course it was.

The sign above the entrance read *Exit through the gift shop*. Below that, a smaller sign added: *No refunds. No lessons*.

Bris took one look and sighed. “We couldn’t resist, could we?”

The walls were lined with merchandise from the exhibits we’d just wandered through. Tote bags featuring famous last words. Scented candles named after tragic eras. Mugs that said “You were warned.” in Comic Sans.

There was a whole shelf of t-shirts printed with quotes from the war exhibit: “Make peace, not spreadsheets.” “Trickle-down trauma.” “I came, I saw, I outsourced.”

I held one up. “Is it satire if it sells?”

Bris sniffed at a rack of novelty plush toys shaped like lobotomised brains, tiny replicas of oil rigs, and a soft toy version of a philosopher’s stone labelled *Now gluten-free*.

“It’s the circle jerk of life, isn’t it?” I said.

Bris replied. “Recycled failure, packaged for profit.”

Behind the counter, a digital assistant smiled and offered bundle deals. One display read: *Buy three mistakes, get one rationalisation free*.

Bris wandered to the self-help section. There were books titled:

- *Monetise Your Guilt.*
- *Finding Meaning in the Algorithm.*
- *Twelve Easy Steps to Justify Everything.*

Next to the checkout was a *museum survival kit*: energy drink, eye mask, stress ball, and a voucher for a meal that was no longer sold.

A mirror hung near the exit, etched with the words: *You're part of the problem, but at least you have taste.*

"I don't know what's worse," I said. "That this exists, or that I want to buy something."

Bris sat down and watched a young couple buy matching "We Failed Together" hoodies without irony.

"It's worse that you're surprised."

We left with nothing, which somehow felt like a purchase. The receipt printed itself anyway. It said: *Thank you for participating in our educational experience. Please rate your existential discomfort below.*

One star. Would spiral again.

* * *

You think you're done now. That's alright. Most people tap out around here.

Some leave five stars, say it was "insightful" or "original" or "hit me right in the feels."

Then they go buy dog food and check their email.

If you do leave a review, make it honest.

Say we tried. Say you laughed. Say it made you uncomfortable but not enough to change anything.

Bris says you cried a little bit in Room Eighteen.

He's probably right. He usually is.

Room Twenty-Three and a Half: The One With the Unpaid Invoice

There was a room the museum map did not show. No exhibit. No pun. No plaque trying to soften the blow. Just a mic on a stand in the middle of an empty floor.

It looked almost like that other room with the chair and the microphone, except here the chair was gone. The air had the same weight though, the same sense that if you stayed quiet, you would regret it later.

Bris didn't follow.

He stopped at the edge and shook his head.

"This part's not for me."

"Why not?"

"Because it's for them. And for you."

So I stepped in alone.

And I let it rip.

* * *

“You want a conclusion? Fine. You want a point to all of this? A final takeaway before we close the door behind us?

“The real failure is that we knew. We’ve always known. And we still didn’t care enough to change.

“We had everything. Compassion. Imagination. Knowledge. Time. We mapped every cliff edge and still ran straight off them, grinning the whole way down. We built machines that could predict hurricanes, decode genomes, translate languages. We can beam ideas across the planet in milliseconds, but we still can’t make sure everyone eats.

“We taught AI how to sound human. Trained it to apologise, reflect, even comfort. Meanwhile, we can’t stop ourselves laughing at suffering or scrolling past it like it’s just more noise. We told the machine how to be kind while forgetting how to do it ourselves.

“And the rich? The tech gods, the business bros, the political toddlers in expensive suits?

“The Oval Office Oaf. A walking tantrum with the emotional depth of a YouTube comment. Tried to end democracy because he couldn’t handle subtraction. People still chant his name like he’s Moses parting the sea, and not a conman who couldn’t part his ass cheeks if they weren’t split already.

“The Bargain-Bin Bond Villain. Built on subsidies and child-mined lithium, then had the gall to pose as Iron Man while firing staff via a meme. The only thing he’s ever launched successfully is his own self-delusion. He’s not a genius. He’s a man-child with Wi-Fi, too much money, and a fanbase confusing arrogance with vision.

“The Social Media Lizard. Built the world’s biggest behavioural experiment and called it connection. Then monetised every insecurity, every argument, every last ounce of dopamine we had left. That social cryptid has done more damage to democracy than half the wars we pretend were for our freedom.

“The Bottle-Piss Baron. Could’ve ended world hunger by lunchtime but decided instead to shoot himself into the upper atmosphere in a cock-shaped rocket. While his empire squeezes every second out of its workers, he buys a 500-million-dollar yacht that comes with a smaller yacht to support the first yacht’s insecurities. The man looks like a dick and acts like one too.

“The AI-Evangelist. He started with a promise. A non-profit, a safeguard, a tool to serve humanity. But the second the dollar signs flickered, the mission shifted. Now it’s just another altar where ethics are traded for growth. The danger isn’t that the machine wakes up and kills us. The danger is that it keeps us exactly as we are: lazy, shallow, and addicted to convenience. He didn’t build a saviour. He built a mirror that flatters the person looking into it while ignoring the background of the world that rots around us.

“All these cunts thinking they’re better than everyone else, mistaking exploitation for achievement, convincing themselves they matter more than the rest of us. They don’t. They never did. They’re parasites, and history will remember them as such.

“But it’s not just them, is it?

“It’s the voters who chose cruelty because kindness looked weak.

“The politicians who handed out contracts to their mates while nurses worked double shifts in bin bags.

“The CEOs who talk about equity while underpaying women and firing anyone who speaks up.

“The social media influencers who cry on camera and call it branding.

“The activists who care until the algorithm stops boosting them.

“The startup charlatans that promise to ‘disrupt poverty’ while selling overpriced solutions to the problems they created.

“Everyone’s building something. No one’s fixing anything.

“We burn forests, poison oceans, drain the future dry. Scroll past misery while eating from apps that underpay the people keeping us fed. We blame the poor for needing help. Blame the sick for costing too much. We let corporations write the laws and then act shocked when they only protect themselves.

“We’ve got sadists in boardrooms and warlords on ballots. We cheer while the last safety net is cut. And when the world burns, we sell marshmallows labelled as limited edition.

“Every crisis was predicted. Every solution ignored. Every tragedy followed by thoughts, prayers, and a 10 per cent off voucher from the brand that helped cause it.

“And still, we pretend. We pretend satire is activism. Pretend awareness is impact. We say we care while doing nothing. We wear causes like clothes, then discard them when the trend fades.

“We’re not a failed species. We’re a species that outsourced responsibility to convenience. That made apathy look normal. That monetised its own extinction.

“All of it, and the universe won’t even notice. It will just keep spinning, waiting for the next noise-making animal to fail more creatively.

“And if you’re sitting there smug because your name wasn’t on my list, congratulations: you’re a cunt too.

“If I’m honest, I’m not even shouting at them. I’m shouting at me. Because I knew as well. And I did nothing.

“At least I’ve said it now.”

* * *

The mic let out a dry pop. Then silence. Not reverent silence. The heavy kind. The kind that waits for you to either break or walk away.

Bris was still at the doorway. Watching.

“You done?”

“No,” I said. “But I’m out of breath.”

Room Twenty-Four: The One With Nothing Left to Say

There was no doorway. Just an absence of walls.

We stepped into it like mist, like guilt, like the unspoken. The lighting didn't change because there was no lighting. The room was lit by whatever you brought with you.

Bris paused at the threshold.

“This feels final,” he said.

I nodded, though I wasn't sure what it meant. The last room had taken something out of me. Like I'd shouted into the abyss and it had absorbed it without even flinching. Silence doesn't always mean peace. Sometimes it just means you're no longer being heard.

There were no displays here. No interactive screens. No clever plaques. Just space. Empty. Echoing.

In the centre of the room stood a pedestal. On it, a single plaque. No glass. No barrier. Just metal, cool and unpretentious.

It read:

You were warned.

That was it.

No footnote. No explanation. No credits. Not even a follow-up link.

Bris walked a slow circle around the room. Not sniffing. Not inspecting. Just... walking.

I stood in front of the plaque for longer than I should have. Waiting for it to change. For the museum to whisper something else. It didn't. There is nothing left to add.

Behind us, the exhibits had gone quiet.

We turned to leave. There wasn't a door. Only the hallway. Only the way back. Or the way forward. Or maybe they were the same thing by now.

Bris fell into step beside me. I didn't ask if he understood. He didn't ask if I did.

The museum didn't close behind us. It stayed open, like it always was, waiting for the next person who thought failure was a thing with a beginning and an end.

It wasn't.

Epilogue: The One Where We Leave Through the Ashes

We stepped out into the same air we'd entered from.

No fireworks. No summary. No reframe. Just outside again.
Just the city, still improvising badly.

The museum didn't vanish. It didn't need to. It just didn't follow. Or maybe it never had. Maybe it was always stitched between bus stops and billboards, in the silence after headlines and the pause before a tweet.

Bris walked ahead, slow now. As if the weight of everything we hadn't said was hanging off his tail.

"You alright?" I asked.

He made a small noise, somewhere between a grunt and a sigh. "It's a lot, isn't it?"

"Yeah."

We walked past a shop with too many mannequins and no customers. A man sold balloons beside a bin overflowing with expired leaflets. A girl crossed the street, eyes locked on her phone, never looking up once.

Everything was normal. That was the worst part.

Bris stopped at a puddle and stared at his reflection.

"You think we'll get it right next time?" I asked.

He looked up at me.

“Do you think we’re done messing up this one?”

Fair point.

We kept walking. Not to escape it because you don’t escape something like the Museum of Failures. You just learn to carry it better.

The world hadn’t changed. But I had a list now. I had a dog who talked when no one else would and listened when no one else did. I had seen the exhibits and read the plaques and walked through every contradiction we built like a monument to ourselves.

That was something. Not redemption. Not absolution. But something.

We’d seen it now. That counts. Doesn’t fix it. Doesn’t forgive it. But it’s in there now, rattling around where you can’t ignore it forever.

And sometimes, that’s the closest thing to progress you’re likely to get.

Author's note

Thank you for reading *This Is Not a Test, But We're Still Failing*.

Some people will finish this book and stare at the ceiling for a while. Others will leave a three-star Amazon review that says "a bit bleak, but the dog was cute".

You already did more than most. You looked. You made it to the end of the museum. You saw the exhibits. Maybe you even saw yourself in them. And if that's all this book ever becomes: a small mirror someone glanced at too quickly, that's still something.

If you ever spot a quiet, square-headed dog watching the world like he's writing it down, make sure to say hi to Bris.

Marcin Wojdyna

Bris returns in *Nocturne for Nine Lives*.

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