**Daily Free-Write March 12, 2021 “Better Luck Next Time”**

Roll those bones! You arrive in Las V-age-as with all the money you manae to scrape together. You’ve invented a new algorithm that’s bound to make you rich. But as you gamble you slowly realize the odds are against you. The woman to your left has bet more than she can afford and the Casino bouncers take her away.

“No…no! Don’t take my age! Just give me another roll! I can do it! I can win!!”

Looks like she’ll be losing a few years. At least it wasn’t too much. If she’s lucky she will still be able to talk.

You look down at the last chips in your hands and gulp. Maybe you should cut your losses. But then what would you do? You’re going to owe the hotel anyway if you don’t have any winnings after tonight. You gulp and roll one last time. You win!

You can barely believe your eyes. Did you really do it?

You roll again. Double or nothing. Win!

A guy elbows his friend. A few more people come to the table.

“Double it!” you yell. The crowd begins to murmur. People are taking side bets as to what will happen next.

Win! You are feeling a little high now. You are building up a head of steam, as they say. Your algorithm depends on risk. If you try to play it safe it will never work.

Win! People applaud. More people at the table now. A few of the people who lost their side bets are dragged away. You shake your head. For every winner, there are ten losers. But you’ve always known you were destined for something different. You keep on rolling.

Soon the Casino has upgraded your room and you call it a night. You’ll pick it up in the morning. But crowd eggs you on. It’s too soon to leave now. One more roll and you’ll walk away with over a million in credit. You you decide on one more roll before you go.

Snake eyes. The casino takes it all. You have to make another bet. The crowd gasps. They were getting to leave but they can’t believe their ears. You’re mad, they say. But they can’t look away as you roll again… and lose.

You are dragged away by the bouncers. Hard to believe this really happened but it did. People shake their heads and look pityingly as you are pulled through the casino to the de-aging room.

“For every ten winners there’s a loser, kid,” The bouncer looks at you and shook his head sadly as he bundles you into the big machine. “I've seen all kinds come through time town. Dreams in their head about where they would end up. Don't feel bad you didn't make it. This town was made to chew you up and spit you out.”

You shake your head and continue to cry. You were supposed to be different. You were gonna be a big shot. Not like all the others who came with their big dreams and ended up losing everything.

The operator presses the button, thankfully ending the large man’s monologue, and the machine whirs to life. You are stripped, shaved, and shrunk. You’re padded up and bundled in a new blanket, then you are brought out to the display room.

"Shhhh… tut tut now, child." says the caretaker, as they set you down in your new bassinet for display. “You’ll be adopted soon enough.”

You're in a care center. A large wide room with rows of low tables and babies inside each one. Personality profiles. Biographies. Genetic thumbprints. Everything there was to know about each and every baby there in full view for any prospective buyer to see. Of course there were background searches on the would-be parents, but these were cursory, and it was an open secret that there were plenty of shady dealings happening in these establishments.

You lay there staring out from your basket but seeing really nothing. You’re lost in your thoughts. Adopted? Really?

"So you lost.” Comes the voice of a grizzled old man the next crib over. “And when you ran out of money you had to start selling your years. Get over it. You'll grow up again.”

He tells you that you’ll get another chance in 18 years. He can read the label on your crib and you realize it’s taken you back even further than you thought. You’re practically a newborn. You learn the adoption fees will take care of the rest of your debt. At least there’s that.

Another caretaker comes by and checks your diaper. You’re soaked! You gasp. When did that happen?

The toddler who was talking waves bye-bye as you are picked up and carried away.

“Now let's get your changed before your new mommy and daddy arrive, okay little munchkin?"

You whine, but they just shove a bottle at you and you grasp it with your hands. It's as if your hands and mouth have a mind of their own and you suck down the sweet liquid as they unpin the thick diaper from between your legs and carefully wipe away any residue of urine that your little body has left behind. The creamy liquid is helping you get your baby fat back with every gulp. You can already see folds overlapping on your stubby little arms. It's even on your stubby little sausage fingers which grib the big bottle turned up up up above your head.

"There we go, little soaker. Good as new!"

He's right. You do feel better in a clean diaper.

You draw air. The bottle is empty. He takes it and burps you, then sets you back in your basket. It’s not fair! First the city took your money, then it took your autonomy. This was the end of the line. But, as the old man-turned toddler said, it was the beginning too. The caretaker gives you an understanding look.

"Just be patient, sweetheart. Your day will come. Maybe next time you'll make it big. This was only your 42nd try."

42nd? But that couldn't be right. You'd only lived one life... haven't you?

A ding is heard and a light you hadn’t noticed turns green over your head. The caretaker smiles and claps.

"Lucky little one! Your new parents are here. Guess it's time for the last step," they say, shining a light your way.

"Look into the light sweetie, you won't feel a thing."

Like an idiot you look. A flash of white. Then. Nothing.

You open your eyes. Everything is so bright. Smiling faces.

"Hewwo baby! Hewwo! Awen't you adowable?"

A beautiful woman is bending down to pick you up, her long hair falling down in a cascade toward you. In moments, you are airborne and she plants a kiss on your cheek, smiling. You smile back.

"Hey there, beautiful," said another voice. Deeper. You feel a big rough hand rubbing the back of your soft head.

"This little one is gonna grow up to be a real smartie pants, yes they are!"

You giggle as he makes funny faces. Mommy and Daddy love you lots, and you're taken home to begin your life anew.