Grief and the Physics Beneath

There is a version of this story where I become a theoretical physicist through the usual route — curiosity, education, a slow narrowing of focus toward the deep questions. That is not what happened. What happened is that life dismantled me, piece by piece, until the only thing left standing was a need to understand what reality actually is. The physics didn't come from curiosity. It came from necessity.

The Wall

When you're young, death belongs to other people. You know — intellectually, abstractly — that it can happen to anyone, at any time. But you don't *feel* it. There's a wall between you and that knowledge, and the wall is so effective you don't even notice it's there. Life fills the space where awareness might otherwise live: jobs, responsibilities, mortgages, ambitions, worries about things that seem urgent but ultimately mean nothing. The machinery of the everyday keeps you occupied, and the wall holds, and you never have to confront how fragile all of it is.

People die around you and the wall still holds. They were old. They were unlucky. They had a condition. Each explanation is quietly a reason it won't happen to you or the people you love. Every loss gets filed into a category that keeps it at arm's length. You can go decades like this — funeral after funeral, each one absorbed into the story that death is something that happens for reasons, to other people, on a timeline you can predict and manage.

The wall held for me for a long time. Then it didn't.

The Diagnoses

I was told I had testicular cancer. There is no way to describe what happens when that word is directed at *you*. All the categories you've been filing other people into — they were old, they were unlucky — become instantly useless. The pronoun changes. It's not *they* anymore. It's *I*.

The chemo worked. The operation worked. I was told I was clear. But "clear" doesn't mean what it used to. It means "for now." And the person who walks out of that experience is not the person who walked in. You've stood on the wrong side of the wall. You can't go back behind it. You've felt the proximity of the edge, and that knowledge is permanent.

Then it happened again. Skin cancer. And the second time, you can't tell yourself it was a fluke. The first time is an event. The second time is a pattern. Your body has become a place where that happens. The operation worked again. I was clear again. I was lucky, they said. But lucky just means the margin was thin and it fell your way. Twice.

I survived. But survival doesn't restore what was lost. The wall was gone. The ground underneath it wasn't stable. And I was different — changed at a level I couldn't fully articulate, carrying a knowledge I couldn't put down.

The Cord

Then I was told my mum had pancreatic cancer. Six to twelve months.

Your own death you can fight. You can sit in the chair, take the chemicals, endure the surgery. You have agency. But when it's your mother, you can't fight it for her. All the resilience and survival instinct that got you through your own cancer — it's useless. You just have to watch.

And I knew too much. I'd been on the other side of a diagnosis. I knew what those words meant, what the treatment would do to her, what the numbers actually said. My own experience didn't soften the blow. It sharpened it.

She died about six months later. I had to say goodbye to her on the phone. Not in the room. Not holding her hand. Just a voice across a distance, trying to carry everything it couldn't possibly carry. And then silence.

Three weeks later, my dad died. He simply gave up the will to live. He had decided, somewhere beneath conscious choice, that there was no reason to stay. I watched my father let go of the thing I had fought hard to keep.

My sister and I both said the same thing: losing both of them was something different from losing one. It wasn't two losses added together. It was structural. As if some invisible umbilical cord to the past had been severed — an unbroken thread connecting us to our own origins. While even one parent is alive, someone still holds your history, still remembers you before you remember yourself. That particular care — the kind that only flows one way, from parent to child, regardless of age — was gone. We were the front line now. Nothing between us and the void.

Ben

About a year later, I lost my best friend. His name was Ben, and he was my dog, and people who haven't experienced it won't understand how that loss can stand alongside everything else I've described. They're wrong.

Ben was the constant. Through the cancer, through the grief, through the days when the world felt stripped bare — he was there. Every single day. He didn't need me to be okay. He didn't need me to explain anything. I could just exist next to him and that was enough.

And it was sudden. No warning, no long decline, no time to prepare. One day he was there. The next he was gone. It felt like someone had punched me in the soul. After everything — after cancer twice, after both parents, after the cord being severed — it was a dog named Ben who brought me to my knees. He was the last piece of simple, wordless, daily comfort, and he vanished without warning.

Sophie

Every loss before this one, however devastating, existed within some framework I could process. Cancer is cruel but impersonal. Parents age and die — even when it comes too soon and too fast, there is a terrible logic to it. A dog doesn't live long enough. None of it was fair, but it was comprehensible.

Sophie was thirty-four years old. She was not old. She was not sick. She was not unlucky in any way that the wall's old categories could explain. She was young, healthy, full of life, with everything ahead of her. We shared a small business together called Present Beings, selling themed crystal boxes. It was never about the money — it was something we both genuinely enjoyed building, and the month before she died we had our biggest sales month ever. Everything felt like it was growing.

Then she was gone. And the circumstances were as cruel as anything I have ever encountered. It appeared her boyfriend was responsible for her death. Ten days later, he killed himself — removing even the possibility of justice, answers, or accountability. There was no one left to confront, no explanation to demand. Just violence, absence, and silence.

This was not death arriving through biology or age or misfortune. This was a life — a young, vital, generous life — apparently taken by the person who was supposed to love her most. Thirty-four years old. It shattered every remaining framework I had for making sense of the world.

And then came the silence of everyone around her. Sophie had been endlessly giving — the kind of person who showed up for everyone, who played a role in all of their lives without ever expecting the same in return. But when she died, the people closest to her seemed more interested in their own narratives than in the truth of what happened to her. Nobody fought for her. Nobody demanded answers. It was as though she had been cast in a supporting role in other people's stories her entire life, and even in death, nobody thought to make her the centre of her own. The indifference was almost as devastating as the loss itself.

The Blessing and the Curse

This is where the physics begins.

When life strips away everything superficial — when you've held your own mortality twice, buried both parents in the space of months, lost your closest companion without warning, and had your world view destroyed by human violence — you don't come back to the surface. You can't. The world as it was previously explained to you is no longer sufficient. It can't contain what you've experienced.

You need to understand what reality actually *is*. Not as an intellectual exercise. As a survival mechanism. What does it mean to exist if existence can be this fragile and this brutal? What is

this reality that can hold both profound love and senseless destruction, and just carry on as if nothing happened?

That's where VERSF came from. That's where the work on time and entropy and the void substrate and the nature of existence came from. Not from a university or a textbook. From grief. From the wreckage of a life that needed answers the ordinary world couldn't provide.

And I have come to see this as both a blessing and a curse. A blessing because I live at a depth now that feels real in a way the surface never did. The work means something to me at the most fundamental level. I'm asking the questions that actually matter, and I'm not afraid of where the answers lead.

The curse is loneliness. When you've been where I've been, small talk becomes almost physically difficult. You want to go deep — you *need* to go deep — but most people don't. Most people are still behind their version of the wall I lost years ago. They haven't had it demolished yet. And you can't explain what's on this side. There's a glass between you and most of the world, and it's not the wall that used to keep death out. It's something else entirely. You see too clearly. You sense too much. And the place that brought you to — the place where you now live, intellectually and emotionally — is one most people don't even know exists.

So you pour it into the physics. Because the physics will go as deep as you need it to go. It won't flinch. It won't change the subject. It will meet you at the level where you actually live now.

Every equation I write, every framework I build, every question I chase to its foundation — it all comes from the same place. It comes from a phone call I couldn't be present for. From a father who let go. From a dog who left without warning. From a young woman who deserved a full life and didn't get one. From the need to understand a reality that could do all of that and still have the audacity to exist.

The grief never leaves. But it transformed into something. And maybe that's what grief does when it goes deep enough — it stops being an ending and becomes a beginning.

Grief is the gift of knowing you gave part of yourself to another, and the curse of never being the same again.