

# SO... WHAT ARE WE BLAMING TODAY?

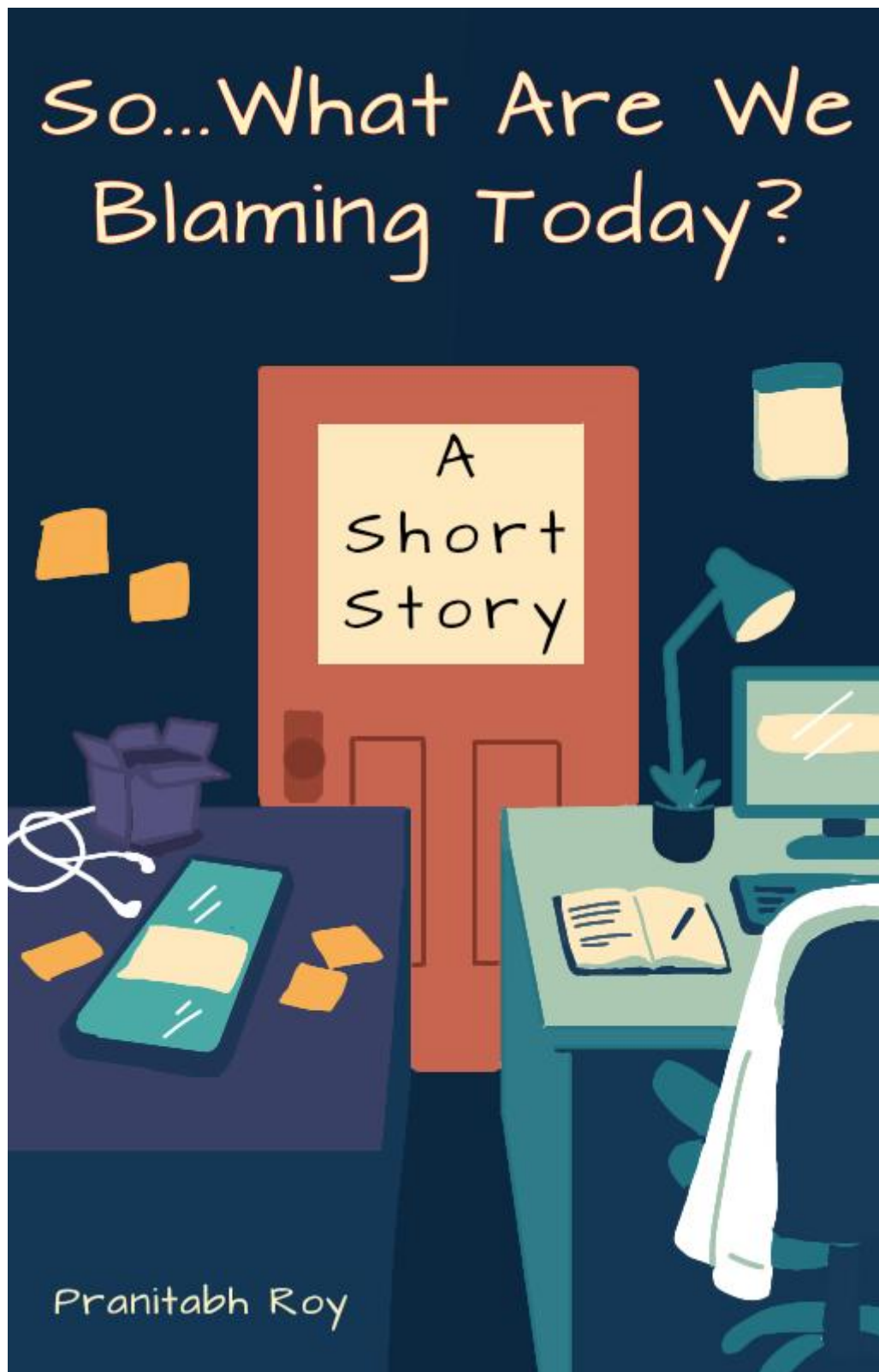
Tales of Hoot

A Short Story by Pranitabh Roy



*The Buried Compass Series #2*

# Book Cover



# About

Help doesn't always arrive with paperwork or fine print.

Sometimes, it's just a line you didn't expect-from a name you can't place.

You won't find it in search results.

It slipped straight past your notifications, and still, it found you first.

No buzz, no ringtone. Just a quiet message:

"So... what are we blaming today?"

These aren't new conversations.

They're the ones that pick up exactly where you never knew you left off-sent from a place you haven't quite reached yet.

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# 001 – No New Messages

The problem with my life was not that it was falling apart, but that it was falling apart **quietly**.

No explosions. No dramatic betrayals. No slow piano soundtrack hinting that I'm supposed to be sad, or at least dramatically inconvenienced. Just a series of notifications I keep swiping away. Like a mosquito that never bites—just hovers.

Forever.

I wouldn't say I hated my job. Because "hate" is an emotion, and my job didn't deserve one. It wasn't fulfilling, it wasn't terrible—it was like toast without butter. Or worse, toast with cold butter that never melts.

The kind of job where you clock in, stare at spreadsheets that stare back at you with equal disappointment, then leave knowing that a part of your soul has been quietly replaced by bar graphs.

I wasn't bad at it, though. That's the trap.

I was just good enough to stay employed. Not good enough to feel impressive. Like a background character in a corporate anime, the kind nobody even bothers to cosplay.

I was, in essence, the Wi-Fi signal of human ambition—barely there, occasionally disconnected, and constantly searching for meaning in the corner of the screen.

People kept telling me I should be grateful. "You have a stable job!"

"You're lucky in this economy!"

But nobody tells you how terrifying it is to wake up one day and realize you've accidentally built a life you don't want, with no idea what you'd rather be building instead.

And that was the worst part. It's not that I wanted to quit. It's that I couldn't even picture what came after quitting.

Not passion. Not purpose. Just a vague fog of "something else" that refused to manifest into anything more specific than a sigh.

One night, during a classic spiral of doomscrolling therapy memes and LinkedIn job listings that I had no intention of applying for, I opened the Play Store.

Typed in: therapy apps.

You know, the kind that let you talk to strangers who pretend to care for legal reasons.

I scrolled past the 5-star polished ones with influencer endorsements and landed on one with a suspiciously low download count, a name I immediately liked:

**"Confesscape".**

And a single line in the description that read:

"Talk to someone. Or don't. It's your mess."

Even their app believed in free will more than the HR did.

Perfect.

## 002 – One New Message

I've read the terms and conditions of maybe four things in my life. One of them was a toaster. The other three were accidental.

That night, I created a Confessscape™ account—because apparently, if you mash "confess" and "escape" together, people believe it's both a solution and a hiding spot. I picked a username out of pure instinct: **Owlsane25**. No owl-related trauma or fascination—just a word that sounded oddly stable in an unhinged kind of way.

I tapped around, browsed profiles of faceless therapists with rating systems that ranged from "empathic genius" to "emotionally unavailable Siri."

I sent a message to three of them. All left me on "seen." Or maybe "ignored." The app wouldn't say. So, I waited about 30 minutes, then did what every emotionally devastated person does: fell asleep with my phone still clutched in my hand, like it might vibrate hope into my bloodstream.

It didn't.

That was yesterday.

This morning, though, had a different headline entirely.

I reached for my phone and checked the date: July 21. As if there was going to be something important—half-expecting nothing.

In fact, 80% of my life could be summarized as "reaching for things and getting nothing."

Messages? None.

Emails? Promotional.

Bank balance? Let's not.

To my surprise, I woke up to a notification I didn't expect—not from the app, but from my lock screen, like it had bypassed normal channels.

One message. No username. Just a text.

> "So... what are we blaming today?"

And then

> "The job? The market? The weather?"

I frowned. Not out of confusion, but because it felt... tailored. Like a message that skipped pleasantries and small talk and jumped right into the trench. No "hello," no "thank you for reaching out." Not even a stock greeting? Rude. Or efficient. Maybe both. It was just a direct, mildly accusatory opener.

Curious, I opened the app.

There it was: a new chat thread, no profile picture, no background, no intro. Just a typing bubble and a username that read:

**[GreyAnswers]** which sounded either like a discontinued crayon or the kind of person who'd win arguments in comment sections. Either way it was vague, but not forgettable.

And the messages that followed?

Sharp. Fast. Not mean, just... surgical.

> "Still obsessively browsing job listings you'll never apply to?"

> "Still blaming the noise for your silence?"

> "Still using tiredness as a shield for everything you don't want to confront?"

They weren't generalizations. They were specific in a way that could only come from close observation—or alarming insight. But I couldn't place why it didn't feel invasive. Just unsettling enough to be effective.

I replied. Because why wouldn't I? It was the first time someone didn't ask me to explain my feelings like they were filing a warranty complaint. The replies came instantly, as if they'd been written before I even sent mine.

The typing bubble paused once. Then resumed. Then paused again.

Odd.



Still, I kept chatting. Because for the first time in what felt like months, I wasn't second-guessing everything I said. The conversation was flowing—flawless, almost eerie in rhythm.

Like someone had rehearsed both sides—as if I was just reading my lines in a play I forgot that I auditioned for.

## 003 – Chat Saved and Encrypted

By now, the conversation had already found its rhythm. Not the musician's kind—more like standing still on a moving walkway, realizing you stopped walking five minutes ago, yet you're somehow still propelled forward.

We were talking. About work. About nothing. About everything that makes "work" such a vaguely menacing word for something you dedicate your life to, all while pretending you're fine.

"So, what do I do if I don't know what I want?"

That was the question I asked. For the third time, maybe. I kept rephrasing it, like I was hoping one of the versions would unlock a different ending.

There was a pause—either he was thinking, or typing with wool mittens again.

Then:

GreyAnswers: "When you don't know what you want, it's usually because you've been trained to only want what other people approve of."

I stared at that message longer than I'd admit. Long enough that my screen dimmed and accused me of being inactive.

I didn't reply.

GreyAnswers: "You never learned to want things without permission."

Ouch.

It wasn't loud. No ALL CAPS, no exclamation points. It just... landed. Like a letter from someone you forgot used to write to you.

GreyAnswers: "So you're not lost. You're just not used to looking inward without asking for directions."

I blinked. Twice. You know, just in case my first reaction was incorrect. And then I laughed. Not because it was funny, but because it was frustrating how uncomfortably correct it felt.

Owlsane25: "So what now? I meditate until I discover I'm secretly a sculptor or something?"

GreyAnswers: "You don't need to find a passion. You need to build tolerance for uncertainty."

What kind of therapist says that? The kind that doesn't charge by the hour, apparently.

GreyAnswers: "A career isn't a soulmate. It's a series of awkward first dates."

That one got me. Not because it was poetic, but because it was practical—a line that belonged on both a résumé and a breakup letter.

Owlsane25: "And what if I pick wrong?"

GreyAnswers: "You already did. That's why we're here."

Brutal. Honest. Accurate. Like getting slapped by someone with really soft hands.

GreyAnswers: "But you survived it. That's something."

And weirdly, it was.

The app made a soft "ding" sound, which I didn't remember enabling. It felt like a checkpoint. Like I'd just completed Level 1 of 'Getting Your Life Together: Demo Version.'

I didn't ask who he was again. I didn't need to. Not yet. But I typed one last thing before putting my phone down.

Owlsane25: "Thanks. Seriously."

GreyAnswers: "Don't thank me. Just remember this conversation when you forget who you are."

That was it.

No "good night."

No "take care."

No link to rate the session.

Just that one last line. And somehow, it stuck harder than anything else in that entire year.

## 004 – Connected, Disconnected, Status Offline

The funny thing about breaking points—it's not like glass. You never hear them snap. They just turn up later, in unexpected places, like new under-eye circles. Or in break room conversations that feel suspiciously like therapy sessions you never booked.

It was a Thursday. Not dramatic enough to be a Friday, not bleak enough to be a Monday—the sort of day that forgets it's in a week.

I was microwaving my lunch, because apparently adulthood is just meal-prepping sadness into plastic containers—when someone from my floor walked in.

A colleague. Friendly. Laughs like a deflating balloon.

He plopped down on the stool next to me like he'd rehearsed the slump. Something about the way his shoulders hung off his bones told me this wasn't about Excel today.

"You ever feel like you just... missed your own exit in life?" he asked.

A normal person would've nodded, changed the subject, or made a vague joke about traffic. But me? Apparently, I had a mini-clinic queued up behind my tonsils.

"Missed your exit," I repeated. "Or maybe took one you didn't realize was only temporary?"

He blinked at me like I had just summarized his autobiography in a sentence.

So I kept talking.

"Most people don't regret where they are," I said.

"They regret not choosing it. When something doesn't feel like a choice, it never really feels like yours. Even if you're good at it."

He stared at the countertop. I watched my spaghetti slowly rotate, like it was being judged by a microwave jury.

"I used to like my job," he mumbled. "But now it feels like I'm just... buffering."

"Then maybe it's time to hit refresh," I shrugged. "Or at least check what's still open in the background."

He laughed, a little. Not balloon-deflating this time.

"Didn't know you were good at this sort of thing."

"I'm not," I said too quickly.

But I was. At least, it felt... easy. Natural. Like I wasn't digging for the right words—they were just there, politely queued up and waiting their turn. And that scared me more than anything.

So that night, I opened the app again.

GreyAnswers was online.

> "Had a good day?" he asked.

"I think I helped someone," I typed. "Said something real. Something that felt... like it came from somewhere deeper than me."

A pause.

> "Glad you remembered," he wrote.

> "That's all I needed..."

And then—like the universe forgot to pay its electricity bill—the chat closed. The screen flickered once.

And the app crashed.

I tried to reopen it, but nothing.

No icon.

No trace in my installed apps.

Vanished. Like it never existed.

I checked the Play Store.

404. Not found.

I Googled the app. Reddit threads. Forums. Therapy blogs.

Zero.

Like trying to remember a dream that had never been yours.

## 005 – Rebooted, Status Online

It's been years.

Not decades. Not lifetimes. Just... years. Enough to forget how many times I changed phones. Enough to stop wondering if I made the right choice. Enough to realize I did make the right choice—because I never had to wonder anymore.

I walked out of the building with automatic doors that say "Welcome" in bold letters but really mean "You're already late."

The receptionist waved me goodbye and said, "Thank you, Doctor."

Still not used to that. Right—that's me now. Not in theory. Not in wishful thinking. In actual laminated ID card reality.

Outside, life was as aggressively normal as ever. Trains are still delayed. Coffee is still overpriced. But I had someone waiting at home who made butterless toast feel like a festival. And a dog who still didn't respect personal space.

I stepped inside, dropped my bag, and hugged my wife. The dog tackled me, so I petted the mutt, kissed him on the forehead—otherwise the dog gets jealous—and made my way to the back room.

It had no label on the door.

But if rooms had soulprints, this one wore mine.

I turned on the PC—the same PC I once used to look for ways out—now I use it to let others in.

The desktop lit up like a polite firework. The screen displayed: July 21.

I glanced down at the business card near my keyboard:

"Clinical Psychiatrist."

I picked it up like I was seeing it for the first time.

I wasn't.



Funny how titles catch up to you like shadows do. But sometimes, you need to remind yourself of the name you earned—not the one you escaped.

That's when I saw it.

Buried deep in an old folder named "Sessions", like a forgotten bookmark in a diary I never admitted to writing.

**Confesscape™.**

The app that vanished from the internet. The one that ghosted the Play Store and me.

It shouldn't exist.

But some things aren't built to be downloaded. They're built to arrive.

I clicked it; it launched.

No login screen. No welcome message. Just a single search bar, blinking. Waiting.

And suddenly I knew what to type—the name I once gave myself when I had nothing else left to give.

And there it was.

My old profile.

'Owlsane25.'

Account created: Yesterday.

My younger self. Trapped in a username. A question mark in a hoodie.

I leaned back. Smiled, almost involuntarily. Then started typing—not as a doctor, not as a therapist, but just as someone who finally knew: the only person who really listens is the one who stays alive long enough to reply.

That night, years ago—the reply that changed everything, the therapist who never gave me his name, the one who told me **exactly** what I needed to hear—it was never someone else.

It was always me.

Then I started typing as GreyAnswers.

Not because I had something clever to say. Not because I needed to fix him.

But because I finally knew how to listen.

The text I typed:

> "So... what are we blaming today?"

Blame, forgiveness, advice—maybe it all sounds better when it's just you and you.

---The End---

# Author's Afterword

When I started writing "So... what are we blaming today?", I didn't expect it to echo so many moments from my own life—those quiet spells of doubt, stalled mornings, and career crossroads.

What began as an honest look at those "in-between" phases turned into a story for anyone navigating modern life's strange mix of work and choices.

The narrator's love for toast: good toast—warm, plain, perfectly crisp—is not a metaphor. It's just comfort, and that's enough. Some things are best enjoyed for their simplicity and flavor, not their deeper meaning. If you find a little happiness in a slice of toast, let yourself have it.

If you're reading this and see your own career questions reflected in these pages, you're in good company. You don't have to figure it out all at once. Life changes gradually, and figuring out what you love (or don't love) is both normal and ongoing. Even I am figuring out.

If this book nudged you to rethink your "something else" or just made you smile, I'm glad.

The line about Thursdays—"Not dramatic enough to be a Friday, not bleak enough to be a Monday"—came from one of my own Thursdays, the kind that feels almost invisible until, suddenly, something shifts. Sometimes, noticing those ordinary days can be the start of something new.

Also, If you enjoyed this story's quiet mysteries, you might want to check out my first book "Tuesday's Left Shoe"—it's another tale about absences, strange routines, and the quiet hope tucked inside everyday places.

Above all, I hope you remember: It's perfectly okay to savor the simple parts of life, whether it's a slice of toast, a slow Thursday, or learning to listen to yourself again.

Keep moving forward, even if progress feels small. Sometimes happiness is just enjoying what's on your plate—literally and otherwise.

And on days when there are no new messages, know that even simple routines—like making toast whether it's with or without butter—are worth enjoying.

Here's to moving forward, one step (and one piece of toast) at a time. If you're still searching for a message, then the next story of mine, where I hope to see you all again, is already:

Typing...

# The Buried Compass Series

1. Tuesday's Left Shoe

**2. So... What Are We Blaming Today?**

3. The Sidelined Shadow

4. The Voice Amongst the Noise

5. TBD