

Let It Go

*Turning dreams into words
Translating emotions into pictures
Breathing life into thoughts*

*True Art-
Requires strength and understanding
Explorations of darkened corners
Pressure on tender areas*

*Finding someone to share it with
Who can be trusted
Who will understand
Be touched and moved*

*Showing them the darkened corners
Letting them know where it hurts*

*Releasing it to the world
Trusting in others
Who may not understand
But need to be touched*

*Bringing light to darkened corners
Soothing pain*

*Some cannot find the words
Some have no one to trust
A special few can share their thoughts*

*Turn dreams into words
Translate emotions into pictures
Breathe life into thought*

Release it to the world

Dedication

Thanks to those who read any of the drafts that slowly developed into this book, and remained my friends anyway.

Disclaimer

This book was not written by me, but by a fictitious character that I created.

Therefore, I take no responsibility for what is contained herein. Furthermore, any similarity between characters and situations presented in this book and reality is purely accidental and should be attributed to random chance, dumb luck, and an almost obscene fondness for small furry woodland creatures.

That having been said...

The Hope Chest

By Arthur Meds

Edited by Michael Wallace Ellingsly

By Charles J. Sloat

Foreword

Arthur Pushkin Meds was born on May 20, 1954, in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam. He was the only son of Prashima Meds. His father's identity remains shrouded in mystery. Prashima claimed that Arthur was the bastard love child of Sir Pandly Moore; a prominent British merchant, who had alleged connections to the Malone family. However, Sir Pandly swore that he never had sexual relations with anyone named Prashima and categorically denied that Arthur was his son. The issue was never resolved. Shortly after Arthur was born, Pandly met an untimely death in a tragic and gruesome accident involving a jet ski, a squid, and an unidentified pointed steel object believed to have been stolen from The British Museum.

Prashima was an untalented stripper and underpaid baker with bad teeth and fallen arches. She was unprepared and unwilling to deal with a child, so when Arthur was born she tried unsuccessfully to convince the hospital staff that the baby was not hers, "He doesn't even look like me." When that failed, she spit up pea soup and claimed to be possessed by demons, "The child must be sacrificed. Saalm must be appeased. Pet the goat! Pet the goat!" Finally, she tried to leave the hospital without the baby, "I need to get a pack of cigarettes and some roti prata. I will be right back." She almost succeeded, but she was spotted brought back to her room by a disgruntled midwife, who insulted her and made fun of her hair.

After a few days of psychotropic drug therapy and intense grief counseling, she left the hospital with her son and a stern warning to, "Get over it!" The first days home with her new baby were rough. She suffered from headaches, crying fits, fever, tremors, nausea, shakes, disorganized thoughts, paranoia, and lack of sleep. Fortunately, her symp-

toms eased once she started drinking again. As her symptoms improved, she slowly got the hang of motherhood and was happy for a time.

After a long hard month of coping with her new baby, she felt trapped and grew restless. Not only did she need to get away, she also longed to have sex with a man named Sven. So she packed her bags, left Arthur on the doorstep of her sister Elenor's house, and headed to the airport.

A few weeks later she returned unfulfilled with a severe sunburn, an unfinished teddy bear tattoo, and green streaked purple hair. She only stayed home for a few days before she ran off again.

Elenor took Arthur in and raised him as her own. Unfortunately, his Aunt Ellie was an eccentric woman who, after the First World War, refused to eat any food that started with the letter 'b.'

By the time he was ten years old, he had already developed some unusual and disturbing habits; such as screaming at bushes, jumping on bugs, taunting small furry woodland creatures, and buying real-estate for no-money-down¹. These behaviors angered neighbors, drew suspicion from federal authorities, and concerned his aunt who felt he needed more structure and stability in his life. She also hated the 'Little Bastard.' Therefore, she called in a few favors and enrolled him in the prestigious Covington Academy. The academy was a boarding school in Bristol, England whose primary mission was to offer guidance and structure to underachieving teenagers who lacked manners, discipline, and clear skin.

"Bring us your rich...
Your Sniveling...
Your spoiled little bastards..."

Its secondary mission had something to do with the spreading of Christian values to the heathen infidels.

"For God so loved the world
That He gave His only begotten son...
That makes you pretty damned expendable!"

His aunt wasn't concerned with such matters. She believed that the school would provide a proper social setting for him. She also hoped

¹This is, of course, impossible.

that the move would get him out of her house, prevent him from eating her food, and stop him from taunting her cat.

Unfortunately, his stay at the academy was short-lived. Arthur did not do well in Covington's structured environment. He lacked the general discipline and personal hygiene needed to fit in. Daily life for him was unpleasant. He was teased by the students, ignored by the faculty, and insulted by the janitorial staff. He tried to compensate for his shortcomings by confusing people, speaking gibberish, annoying ferns, and impersonating potted plants. His efforts only alienated him further and after two years, he was thrown out of the academy when a practical joke involving combustible gasses and a mop almost killed a priest and injured a duck. He returned home and continued his education in Brunei.

In 1974, he dropped out of school to begin an apprenticeship at his mother's bakery. In the years that followed, he avoided conscription into national service by wearing dresses and studying dance.

When he turned 30, he immigrated to the United States where he met Alamina Pelomna while standing in line at a bank. Their encounter was brief. He bumped into her and she called him a jerk. They never saw each other again. By the middle of 1978, he had settled in Cincinnati, Ohio where he found work in a dank and depressing office sorting stamps and organizing butterflies for an eccentric collector.

It was in that office on an old typewriter that Arthur wrote his first book *Following My Lead*. He spent several years trying to generate interest in his novel. When he finally found a publisher, he faced further disappointment. Not only was the book an enormous commercial failure, but also the lone critic who read it wrote: "The sole redeeming value of this post-apocalyptic allegory is that should the human race wipe itself out in some great act of cataclysmic stupidity, then no one would ever be able to read this book again." The review devastated Arthur who maintained that the story was a scathing exposé of the lobster fishing industry.

After the failure of *Following My Lead*, he became despondent and would have given up writing altogether were it not for the prodding of his friends, who convinced him to work on another novel. More importantly, they told him to get the hell out of their house and to stop eating their food.

Five weeks after he started bathing on a regular basis, he completed his second book, which he ironically titled *Tag Sale of the Soul*. The story was supposed to be a highly fictionalized account of Arthur's experi-

ence as a missionary in Namibia. Oddly, no one has been able to produce any evidence that Arthur had ever done any missionary work. As a matter of fact, it was alleged that Arthur never did anything nice for anyone, ever.

As with his first novel, this book achieved little notoriety. It wasn't until the publication of *Useless Inconsistencies* in the spring of 1984, that he attained acceptance as a writer. His third book was not only a staggering commercial achievement, but it was also a great critical success. The following year, he was awarded the prestigious **Milton S. B. Davis Covington Award for Literary Effectiveness** by The Critic's Circle.

Despite the popularity of *Useless Inconsistencies*, no one was prepared for the unprecedented triumph of *The Hope Chest*; first published by the now defunct Starpington Press in 1987. The simple story of a man and a pub had an unexplainable appeal. With the publication of *The Hope Chest* Arthur established himself as one of the premier writers of the 20th century.

The public anxiously awaited his next novel, which he had tentatively titled *The Boat Docked at Pier 14*. It was slated for publication in the spring of 1993.

Unfortunately, before he could complete the book, Arthur Meds died tragically in a bus related accident on October 13, 1992. Even though the draft was incomplete and incoherent, BenchPress Press published the manuscript in its unfinished form in 1994. Readers and critics alike embraced the book and it became Arthur's second #1 Best Seller. Since then, another publishing company bought the rights to four other partially completed manuscripts.² They were immediate and overwhelming successes.

Then in the fall of 1996, Mrs. Wilemina Parkhaus claimed to have found the original draft of *The Hope Chest* in a diaper bag in Chicago. The draft appeared to be a rough version of the final story. The manuscript also contained marginal notes, scenes, and an odd assortment of characters that didn't appear in the published novel.

Critics initially dismissed the papers as an elaborate and unconvincing hoax. They argued that the story bore only a superficial resemblance to the published novel. Arthur's friends also claimed the notes in

²It is widely accepted by many literary critics that only three of the four manuscripts can be attributed directly to Arthur. The fourth one is almost certainly a partial, if not complete, fabrication

the margins were too legible to have been written by him, and literary experts were certain that he would never have included lumberjacks or mechanics as characters in his story. Furthermore, no one could link the diaper bag to Arthur.

Rigorous testing at three separate laboratories put these concerns to rest. The tests confirmed with a 99.9956% certainty that the documents were genuine. The debate was officially resolved when McGregor & Daniels OPCA Testing Inc. granted their final certification in the fall of 1998.

Our company has obtained the exclusive rights to that draft. It is our privilege to make the copy available to the public. We have made every attempt to keep the text as close to the original as possible.

Some changes were unavoidable.

Due to the popularity and simplicity of ‘spell-check,’ we have fixed obvious misspellings. However, we have not corrected the myriad of grammatical errors or factual mistakes (it was just easier that way). We converted Arthur’s original hand-written and parenthetical notes into italics. In addition, we replaced the word ‘orange,’ when used in relation to Harty Mitciv, with the word ‘hat.’ While a civil case is pending, we have omitted all but one reference to an alleged illegal real-estate scheme. Finally, at the request of the owner of a Chinese take-out, their telephone number has been removed from the ‘deli scene.’ The editors would like to state that there is no validity to the claims that Artthtur encrypted the number elsewhere in the novel and preceded it by, ‘For a good time call...’

By providing the work in this form, it is our hope and our intention that the reader might gain some appreciation and insight into the mind of one of the most influential literary figures of the post 14th century.

Whether you have read the original novel or not, we believe this work will stand on its own, albeit shaky, merits.

Michael Wallace Ellingsby

J.P.D.D.P.T.

This Page Has Been Accidentally Left Blank.

We apologize for any confusion this may cause.

Part: The Only

The chilly August day began like others before it.

That's a horrible sentence and those first two letters are way too big.

It was Tuesday and singing birds could be heard in the stillness of the moonlit night. After weeks of discussions and arguments, an uneasy calm settled over the city.

The debate was over.

The city council had finished counting the ballots. The citizens of Parson Valley had made their decision. The old lady had toasted her last piece of bread.

Strike the old lady.

The old lady was dead.

That's not what I meant.

The old lady was not quite dead, but she was gravely ill and emotionally unstable.

Forget it!

In exactly twenty-seven-and-a-half hours, the saloon would be torn down to make way for low-income housing for Parson Valley's elderly citizens.

The final roadblock was removed when RAFLA, the group responsible for the protests, withdrew their legal challenges. Thomas J. Flingson and his sons were hurriedly making final preparations to reduce the once proud building to a pile of rubble.

It was just as well.

You can say that again.

The saloon had seen better days. Once, it was a place where people could meet. It was a place where they could talk. It was a place where problems seemed remote. It was tucked away down a deserted alley. For the last ten years, it sat empty and neglected behind a locked iron gate. The large red sign that had drawn so much attention was broken and faded. Its distinctive green markings were almost invisible, indecipherable, and *(something else beginning with 'in')*.

Few people over the age of forty-four had not heard of the saloon. At one time or another, many lost and frightened souls sought refuge there.

Although the saloon attracted a number of visitors, there were few regulars. Most people found the saloon by accident had a drink or two, and never returned.

There was one exception.

One customer came in at 9:35 on a chilly Wednesday evening in August. He behaved oddly, had a drink, and left. He returned the following Wednesday and acted in much the same way. In the weeks that followed, his visits became routine and predictable. The ritual continued until his death, which was the tragic result of an unfortunate encounter with a jet ski and a squid.

That was an unsubstantiated rumor. According to some accounts, it wasn't a squid at all; but rather a large amphibious creature believed to have become extinct during the Cretaceous period.

He was an ordinary man, although no one knew much about him. He came and went. His name was unimportant. His hair was of average length. His face could not be picked out of a crowd.

He had two other distinguishing characteristics: he was incapable of spelling the word 'atrocious' and he refused to bathe on a regular basis. However, I believe it would be best if those minor character flaws were never mentioned.

His Wednesday night routine never varied.

He entered the saloon, sauntered up to the bar, and ordered a glass of water. As soon as the water arrived, he lifted the glass, looked up, and said, "Forgive me."

After he spat on the floor and insulted a fat person, he drank the water. He returned the glass to the table, then he slammed down a quarter and left.

I did it!

*I started the novel I promised myself I would write. It may be dreadful, but the plot of this story is better than the one I used in **Following My Lead**.*

In spite of the fact that I am off to a terrible start, the overall premise might be salvageable, especially if I add scenes containing explicit sex and gratuitous violence.

It works for everything else.

Before I continue, it would be helpful if I made some necessary (and, in some cases, rather arbitrary) changes. These alterations will allow the rest of the story to flow more naturally and make at least a small amount of intuitive sense. For example, spitting should be reserved for the end of the story and encounters with squid should be avoided altogether.

Let's start with the first sentence; 'The chilly August day...' I can't recall too many of them, so I will describe the day as 'unbearably humid.' If the city is 'moonlit,' then the day has to 'end like others before it.' If that's the case, then the 'singing birds' must go. Unfortunately, for reasons better left unexplained, I must use the phrase 'singing birds.' Therefore, I will find a way to work them into the story at a later point. It would add to the symbolism if I changed the setting of a saloon to a pub and approximated all numeric values.

Next, I need to deal with the man, who is representative of the slow decay and depravity inherent in post 17th century society. If that's the case, he should enter the pub on Tuesday instead of Wednesday. Since the scene will take place in a pub, it would be more fitting for him to order whiskey. Rather than saying, "Forgive me," he will apologize to a man known only as Tim. Additionally, he will leave a twenty-dollar bill on the bar instead of a quarter.

It might also be helpful if I did a better job of describing the man, who is, after all, at the heart of the story. Therefore, he should wear an ugly borrowed blue shirt and have thick glasses. He will have an inexplicable red smear on his left elbow and his left hand will be slightly larger than his right.

After those changes, what do I have left?

The chilly August day began like others before it.
However, this fact has nothing to do with our story.

Sounds good to me.

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The year was 1983.

The month was January.

The day was Tuesday.

The time was nine o'clock.

It could have been any year, any month, any day, any time.

It wasn't.

They blamed themselves.

~~~~~

"What the hell was that?"

The question was unnecessary, but some idiot with bad teeth and fallen arches asked it nonetheless.

Moments before the explosion, Mrs. Menatti accidentally dropped her purse...

Explosion!?!?

I have only just begun and I'm already blowing things up?

Moments before the explosion, Mrs. Menatti accidentally dropped her purse and watched in dazed horror as its unusually colorful and extremely personal contents bounced and scattered on the hard gray-tiled floor. The sound echoed loudly against the concrete walls of the basement of the school.

Suddenly everyone in the room was staring at her.

She squirmed uncomfortably. She did not like being the center of attention. After all, she spent her time at the meeting sitting quietly in a corner, biting her fingernails, and clutching her purse. Were it not for Dr. Paulson's personal invitation, she would have avoided the meeting altogether and spent the afternoon burning cats and taunting cookies.