

What did you expect it to fix?

A short book about believing the next job, house or partner
will finally make you content

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First edition

Written by AI with human guidance. It can
contain mistakes, which later editions correct.

Contents

1. Before you start
2. Nine o'clock, the listings, and the hum
3. Why the next thing makes sense
4. "This one will be different"
5. "I'd be happy if only"
6. "People who have it are happier"
7. "Feeling like this means something's wrong with my life"
8. "It worked last time"
9. "If everything wears off, why bother with anything?"
10. "Settling is giving up"
11. "I can picture exactly how it'll feel"
12. "The new job will fix it"
13. "The house will fix it"
14. "The right person will fix it"
15. "A baby will fix it"
16. "Once I've got enough money"
17. What the next thing costs you
18. What it does to the things you get
19. Fix or hope
20. Keep the season
21. Improve the life in hand

22. The decision

23. Mid-move, the partner who wants it, the bad situation, the first job, retirement, the baby, and when it's more than the hum

24. When you were back on the listings at nine

25. Thursday, four o'clock

26. Notes

Before you start

This is a short book and you can read it in two or three sittings. It's about one habit, which is carrying a low, steady discontent around and expecting the next big thing to settle it. The next thing changes. For a few years it's a job, then it's a house with one more room, then it's a different town, a different partner, a baby, a promotion, or the day you can stop working altogether. What doesn't change is the shape of the expectation. When I've got that, this feeling will go.

I'm going to argue three things. The first is that the expectation makes sense from the inside, because the relief when the next thing arrives is real. Nobody who has moved into a house they wanted, or started a job they chose, needs telling that the first months feel different. The second is that the research on what happens after big life changes is fairly consistent about what comes next, and it isn't what the expectation promises. On average people react, feel better for a season, and then drift back towards where they were, while the discontent finds something new to attach to. That isn't true of everyone or of every change, and I'll be honest about where it isn't. The third is practical. There's a question you can ask about any next thing that tells you whether it's a fix or a hope, and there's a way of improving the life you've got that doesn't wait for anything to arrive. Chapters 18 to 21 cover how.

This book isn't against changing your life. Some changes fix things, and chapter 2 says which. If your job is making you ill, your home is damp or unsafe, or your partner is unkind to you, those are

things to leave, and nothing here is telling you to stay and work on your outlook. This book is about the discontent that has survived two or three next things already, and the one you've got lined up now.

Two cautions.

If the flatness has been there most of the day, most days, for a fortnight or more, and you've lost interest in things you used to enjoy, the NHS says that's a reason to see a GP. Do that before you decide anything about jobs or houses. What's in this book might still be useful afterwards, but it isn't the first step.

And if the next thing in your case is usually something you can order, a coat, a phone, a bag, then the small version of this habit is the subject of an earlier book in this series, *You didn't want it yesterday*, and that one will fit you better.

The notes at the back give my sources and their limits. Where I'm giving my own reasoning and not a finding, I'll say so.

Nine o'clock, the listings, and the hum

It's nine in the evening and the day is done. You're on the sofa with the phone, and you've opened the property site again. You don't have a plan to move. You've got a search saved, though, three bedrooms, a garden, twenty minutes further out than where you are, and you scroll through the new ones the way other people scroll through the news. You stop on one with a kitchen that opens onto the garden. You look at the photographs twice. For about a minute and a half you're living there, and the version of you who lives there is calmer than the one on the sofa. Then you close it and the sofa is the same sofa.

Or it's the job board. You're not unhappy at work exactly. You're tired of it in a way that doesn't have a name, and you've got a search saved there too. Or it's a friend's life, the one who moved to the coast. Or it's a Saturday walk past a bigger house. Or it's the thought, on a bad day, that things would be different with a different person, or with a child, or with the kind of money that makes a bad day cost nothing.

Underneath all of those is the same thing. There's a low, steady discontent that has been there for a while, and it's not about anything in particular. It's not a crisis. Most days it's just a hum. And you've got an answer for it, which is that once the next thing has happened, the hum will stop.

These are invented, but I'd guess yours is close. Some words. **The hum** is the discontent, low and steady and not about anything you could point at. **The next thing** is whichever job, house, town,

partner, baby, promotion or retirement is currently expected to stop it. **The if-only** is the sentence the next thing lives in, "I'd be fine if only". **The season** is the months of real relief after the next thing arrives. **The wearing off** is the end of that. **The new object** is what the hum attaches to afterwards, because it does attach to something. **A fix** is a change that removes a cause you can name. **A hope** is a change you expect to remove a feeling. **The life in hand** is the one you've got now, on a Thursday, before anything has arrived.

Before you go on, do one thing. Write down the last three next things you had. The job you took, the flat you moved to, the person, whatever they were. Next to each one write two things. How you felt in the first month, honestly. And what the hum was attached to a year later. If you can't remember a year later, that tells you something too.

Why the next thing makes sense

Nobody keeps a property search open at nine at night because they've weighed it up and decided it's the best use of the evening. They keep it open because the hum is there and the listings answer it. For a minute and a half at a time, they do. It's worth being clear about what the next thing gives you, because a belief that gave you nothing wouldn't survive three rounds.

It gives you an explanation. A hum that's about nothing is hard to live with. A hum that's about the kitchen, or the manager, or the town, is a problem with a solution, and a problem with a solution is a better thing to carry than a mood. It gives you a direction. The next thing turns a flat stretch of years into a run-up to something. It gives you somewhere to put the evening, because the listings and the job board and the imagined move are a real pleasure, and I'm not going to pretend they aren't. And it gives you, when the next thing finally arrives, a season of feeling better that is entirely real. The first month in the new house, the first weeks in the new job, the first year with the right person, you did feel different. You weren't imagining it.

More than that. Some next things are fixes. If you're in a job where you're bullied, the new job removes the bullying. If your flat has mould on the bedroom wall, the new flat has a dry bedroom wall. If your partner belittles you, the end of that is the end of being belittled. A change that removes a cause you can name changes what happens on a Thursday afternoon, and it keeps changing it,

because the cause is gone. This book is not going to tell you that everything wears off. It's going to tell you how to tell the changes that don't from the changes that do.

Underneath the next thing there's usually a set of beliefs, and they're the chapters that follow. That this one will be different. That you'd be happy if only. That the people who have the thing are happier. That feeling like this means something is wrong with your circumstances. That it worked last time. That settling is giving up. That you can picture exactly how the new life will feel. Then the specific ones, the job, the house, the person, the baby, the money. Each has something true in it, and each is doing the same work, which is turning a feeling into a destination.

The hum is real and the season is real. What I want to look at is the middle, the eighteen months between them, and what the research on big life changes says happens there.

"This one will be different"

Look at the list you made in chapter 1. If it has three next things on it, then three times you have believed that this particular change was the answer, and three times, if you're honest about the year-later column, the hum turned up again attached to something else. That's not a character flaw. It's a pattern, and the striking thing about it is that it doesn't feel like a pattern from the inside. Each next thing arrives as a fresh case. The house was a mistake because of the commute, but the next house won't have that commute. The job was wrong because of the manager, but the new job has a different manager. Every time, the thing that went wrong was specific and the thing that's coming is specific in a different way, so the pattern never gets to show itself.

The research on job changes has a name for this. Wendy Boswell, John Boudreau and Jan Tichy followed a sample of managers and measured their job satisfaction before, during and after voluntary job changes. What they found was low satisfaction before the move, a rise immediately after it, and then a decline. They called it the honeymoon-hangover effect, and their point was that the whole sequence could be seen within the same people. It wasn't that some people were happy in new jobs and others weren't. The same person went up and then came down.

Adrian Chadi and Clemens Hetschko found the same shape in German panel data, in a paper whose title is "The magic of the new". Workers who chose to change employer reported unusually high job satisfaction afterwards, and the authors' phrase for how long it lasted was "in the short term only". They then looked at

people whose job change was forced by their workplace closing, and for those people the new job brought no rise at all. The rise belonged to the choosing, not to the job.

Sit with that for a moment, because it's the most useful finding in this book. The season isn't a property of the next thing. It's a property of having chosen and got something. That's why each one feels different from the inside and comes out the same. The new house isn't the same as the old house. The feeling of having got the new house is exactly the same as the feeling of having got the old one, and it wears off on the same schedule.

So the honest answer to "this one will be different" is that the thing will be different and the season will be the same. Whether the hum comes back depends on something else, which is whether the thing removed a cause. Chapter 18 is about how to tell. For now, go back to your list and look at the year-later column again. If the hum came back all three times, the fourth next thing needs a better reason than being the fourth.

"I'd be happy if only"

The if-only is a small sentence and it carries most of the weight. "I'd be happy if only I had a garden." "I'd be fine if only I wasn't doing this job." It sounds like a description of your situation. It's actually a forecast, and forecasts about how a different life would feel are a thing psychologists have tested, because they turn out to be wrong in a particular way.

David Schkade and Daniel Kahneman asked large numbers of students in the American Midwest and in Southern California two kinds of question. They asked them to rate their own satisfaction with life, and they asked them to rate how satisfied someone similar to themselves would be who lived in the other region. The students in the two regions were equally satisfied with their lives. But when asked about the other region, people in both places expected Californians to be happier than Midwesterners. When the researchers looked at why, the answer was the weather. Climate was rated as much more important for someone living somewhere else than for the person doing the rating about their own life.

Their name for this was the focusing illusion. When you think about a different life, you think about the things that are easy to see and different from yours, the sunshine, the garden, the job title, and those things get far more weight in the forecast than they'll have in the living. On a Thursday afternoon in California, the sunshine is just the weather. The person under it is thinking about their work and their family and whether they've replied to that email, the same as the person in the Midwest under a grey sky. The climate is real and the difference in satisfaction is nothing.

That's the if-only. It takes the one feature of the next thing that's most visible from here, the one that's most different from the life in hand, and makes the forecast out of that feature alone. The garden is what you can see from the sofa. Thursday afternoon in the garden, with the same job and the same tiredness and the same hum, is what you can't.

You may know this error from the other direction. An earlier book in this series, *The good old days had problems too*, is about the same forecast pointed backwards, where a past that's easy to see in outline gets rated as happier than it was. The next thing is the same trick played forwards, and it's worth noticing that the mind that does it is yours in both cases. What you can do about it is the subject of chapter 18. The short version is that the if-only needs to be forced to describe a whole Thursday, not a feature.

"People who have it are happier"

You've got evidence, and it isn't only your own imagination. You know people who've got the next thing. The friend on the coast seems calmer. The colleague who went to the bigger company posts about it. The couple with the house with the kitchen you want seem, when you're at their table, to be living the life you're forecasting. If the if-only is a forecast, then those people are the data, and the data look good.

Two problems with the data. The first is the sample. You see people with the next thing at their best, at their table, on the occasions when you're invited, and what you're looking at is an occasion. Another book in this series, *You only saw the good bits*, is about that and I won't repeat it here. The second problem is more interesting, and it's that even when researchers get a proper look at people who have the thing, the thing turns out to be doing less than it looks.

Daniel Kahneman, Alan Krueger, David Schkade, Norbert Schwarz and Arthur Stone put it plainly in a paper in 2006 whose title is a question, "Would you be happier if you were richer?" Their answer was that the belief is widespread and mostly illusory. People with above-average incomes were, when asked to rate their lives, relatively satisfied. But when their actual moment-to-moment experience was measured, they were barely happier than anyone else. They tended to be more tense. They didn't spend more of their time doing things that were particularly enjoyable. And the effect of income on satisfaction, the authors said, seemed to be transient, which is the season again.

So the friend on the coast will, if you ask, say her life is good. She's rating her life, and rating your life is exactly where the next thing does show up, because you look at the outline and the outline has a coast in it. But her Thursday afternoon, the part where the hum lives, is a Thursday afternoon. The paper's explanation for the gap is the same focusing illusion as the last chapter. When people evaluate a life, their own or someone else's, they focus on the conventional achievements, and the achievements are visible while the Thursdays aren't.

I'm not saying the friend is secretly miserable. I'm saying that the thing you're measuring when you look at her, the calm, is mostly an outline you're filling in, and that the research which has looked inside those outlines finds the days to be more ordinary than the outlines. That's good news, in a way. The gap between you and her is smaller than the listings make it look, and the part of it that's real is not the coast.

"Feeling like this means something's wrong with my life"

This is the belief that holds the others up. If you feel a steady dissatisfaction, something must be causing it, and the cause must be out there in the circumstances, because that's what dissatisfaction is for. It's a signal. Pain means something's wrong with the body, and the hum means something's wrong with the life, and the sensible response to a signal is to find the cause and change it.

Sometimes that's right, and chapter 2 said so. But the research on how people's happiness behaves over years suggests it's often not, and the reason is a little uncomfortable. Ed Diener, Richard Lucas and Christie Napa Scollon reviewed the evidence in 2006 and listed what needed revising in the old idea that everyone drifts back to the same neutral level after anything that happens. Two of their revisions matter here. People have different baseline levels, and those levels depend in part on temperament. And those baselines aren't neutral. Most people sit somewhat above the middle most of the time, and where each person sits is partly a fact about them rather than about their circumstances.

Which means the hum might be your level. Not a permanent sentence, the same review says baselines can change, and chapter 8 is about how. But a level, a place your mood returns to that's a bit lower than you'd like and has been for years, across two jobs and three flats and at least one relationship. If that's what it is, then it isn't a signal about the kitchen. It's the weather you carry, and moving doesn't change the weather you carry.

Here's the test I'd use, and it's my suggestion rather than a finding. Ask whether the hum has a shape. A signal about circumstances is specific. It's worse on the days you see the manager and better on the days you don't. It's worse in the flat and lifts when you leave it. It arrived when a particular thing changed and it would end if that thing changed back. A level isn't like that. It's roughly the same in the new place as the old one after the season ends. It was there before the job and it's there in the job. It attaches to whatever's nearest, and when that changes it attaches to what's nearest after that.

If yours has a shape, find the cause and this book will help you change it well. If yours doesn't, then the next thing is being asked to fix something it can't reach, and the rest of the book is about what can.

"It worked last time"

You've got a strong reply to all of this, which is your own memory. The move did work. The first months in the new place were the best you'd felt in years, and you can remember the feeling. So whatever the research says about averages, your experience says a next thing can lift the hum, because one did.

It did. The season is real, I said so in chapter 2, and I'm not going to take it back. The question is what happened after it. Maike Luhmann, Wilhelm Hofmann, Michael Eid and Richard Lucas gathered every longitudinal study they could find on how well-being changes after big life events, 188 publications and nearly sixty-six thousand people, covering marriage, divorce, bereavement, the birth of a child, unemployment, getting a job again, retirement and moving. Two things came out. Different events have different effects, and how good an event is supposed to be turned out to be a poor guide to what it did. And the effects on how people rated their lives were stronger and more consistent than the effects on how they felt day to day.

Read that second finding alongside the last chapter. The events changed the rating, the outline, more reliably than they changed the days. The days are where the hum lives.

The single clearest study of the season and the wearing off is one of marriage. Richard Lucas, Andrew Clark, Yannis Georgellis and Ed Diener followed more than twenty-four thousand people in Germany for fifteen years, through weddings and everything after. On average, people reacted to marriage with a rise in life

satisfaction and then adapted back towards where they'd been. The average, though, hid a lot. Some people rose and stayed up for years. Some people went the other way. I'll come back to those differences in chapter 13, because they're the most hopeful part of the research. But the average is the honest answer to "it worked last time". It did work, and then, for most people, it wore off, and the wearing off is the ordinary course of events rather than a sign that you chose the wrong thing.

A new coat is warm and it's also new, and for the first fortnight you notice it every time you put it on. By spring it's your coat. It's exactly as warm as it was, and you don't notice it at all.

That's the season. The next thing keeps whatever real warmth it has. What wears off is the noticing, and the noticing was the part that felt like the hum going. If you want the next thing to keep working the way it did in the first month, chapter 19 is about the two things the research suggests slow the wearing off. Neither of them is getting another one.

"If everything wears off, why bother with anything?"

At this point the argument can tip into something bleak, and I want to stop it before it does. If the season always ends and the hum always comes back, then it seems to follow that nothing you do matters, and you might as well stay where you are and stop wanting things. That isn't what the research says, and the way it isn't is important.

Richard Lucas summarised the panel studies in 2007 under a title that includes the phrase "set-point model", and his conclusion was that adaptation isn't inevitable. Some events are associated with lasting changes in how people feel about their lives, years later, with no return to where they were. His list was divorce, the death of a spouse, unemployment and disability. The earlier unemployment study he did with Clark, Georgellis and Diener, in the same German panel as the marriage study, found that people hit by unemployment reacted strongly, shifted back partway, and on average never got all the way back, even after they'd found work again. A second spell of unemployment hit them just as hard as the first. Nobody got used to it.

Notice what's on that list. The events that change people for good are mostly losses. Divorce, bereavement, losing work, losing health. The gains, the wedding, the new job, the first child, are the ones that tend to wear off. It's not a perfect split, and Lucas is clear that people differ a great deal in how much they adapt to anything.

But as a rough shape it's this. Bad things can move your level down and keep it there. Good things lift you for a season and let you back down.

That's not a reason to do nothing. It's a reason to point your effort differently. The next thing is an attempt to raise the level by acquiring something, and the research says that attempt mostly returns you to where you were. Protecting against the losses, the job that's actually damaging you, the marriage that's actually breaking, the health you're not looking after, is the part where your effort changes the level for good, because those are the changes that don't wear off in either direction.

So the answer to "why bother" is that you bother about the right things. Leave the job that's harming you, and expect the leaving to keep working, because you've removed a cause. Don't leave a job that's merely ordinary in search of a rise, because the rise has a season. The Diener review said baselines can change under some conditions. It didn't say the conditions were a bigger kitchen. The rest of this book is about what they might be for you, and most of it is done inside the life in hand.

"Settling is giving up"

There's a word waiting for anyone who stops chasing the next thing, and the word is settling. You know people who settled. They're in the job they had at twenty-eight and the house they bought at thirty, and something in the way you think about them is a little sorry for them, and the thought of becoming them is one of the things that keeps the search open at nine. If you stop wanting more, you've given up.

I want to take the word apart, because it's doing a job. Settling means accepting a life you didn't choose because you couldn't get the one you wanted. That's a real thing and it's sad. But it isn't the only alternative to chasing. There's a third position, which is choosing the life in hand, and it looks the same from the outside and is nothing like it from the inside. The person who settled is still comparing, every day, the life they've got with the one they didn't get, and losing. The person who chose is comparing nothing. They've looked at the life in hand, decided it's the life, and put their effort into it rather than into the search for its replacement.

The difference shows on a Thursday afternoon. The settler is on the sofa with the listings open and a hum. The chooser is doing something to the garden they've got.

Now the word content, because I've been using it and I should say what I mean. I don't mean happy. Happy is a high, and it's the feeling of the season, and it can't be held. Content is lower and steadier. It's the state of not needing the situation to be different in order to get on with the afternoon. It's compatible with wanting

things, with ambition, with plans. What it isn't compatible with is the if-only, the belief that the afternoon can't be got on with until something arrives. That's my definition, not a researcher's, and I think it matters because the next thing promises happy and what most people actually want, when they look closely, is content. The season gave you happy for two months and then took it away. Content is what the season never delivered, because it isn't the sort of thing a delivery can bring.

So "settling is giving up" has it half right. Settling is giving up. Choosing isn't, and choosing is available to you now, with the job and the house and the person you've got, on the condition that you stop treating them as the waiting room for the real ones. That's harder than moving, in one way, because moving is a thing you do once and choosing is a thing you do on Thursdays. It's also the only one of the two that the research suggests can change the level.

"I can picture exactly how it'll feel"

Part of what makes the next thing so convincing is the clarity of the preview. You can see the kitchen. You can see yourself at the table in the new job, you can see the town, the walk to the shops, the evenings. The preview is detailed and it comes with a feeling attached, and it seems reasonable to treat a preview that clear as a reliable forecast. If you can see it that well, you must know how it'll feel.

Timothy Wilson and Daniel Gilbert spent years studying how well people predict their own future feelings, and their summary of the field in 2005 has a name for the main error. They call it the impact bias. People overestimate both how strong their emotional reaction to a future event will be and how long it will last. One cause is what they call focalism, which is the same error as chapter 4 in a different coat. When you picture the new life you picture the new thing, and you leave out everything else that will also be going on, the work, the weather, the argument about whose turn it is, the tiredness on a Thursday. The preview is clear because it's been emptied of everything but the feature.

The other cause they name is stranger. People fail to anticipate how quickly they'll make sense of what happens to them. Whatever arrives, good or bad, the mind gets to work on it, explains it, files it, makes it ordinary. That process is fast and it's mostly invisible, and because it's invisible it never makes it into the forecast. You picture the kitchen as it will look on the first morning. You don't picture the morning six months later when it's just the kitchen, because from here you can't feel the process that will make it so.

An earlier paper by Gilbert and colleagues found the same thing running the other way. In six studies, people were asked to predict how long they'd feel bad after events ranging from a relationship ending to being turned down for a job, and they consistently predicted their bad feelings would last longer than they did. The authors called the machinery that shortens the bad feelings a psychological immune system, and the error of leaving it out of the forecast immune neglect. It matters here because the same machinery works on the good feelings. The system that makes a rejection bearable in a month is the system that makes the new kitchen ordinary in six.

So the clarity of the preview is not evidence about the future. It's evidence about what you've left out. A forecast that includes the other things going on, and includes the mind's habit of making the new thing ordinary, is blurrier and more accurate, and it's the one chapter 18 asks you to make. What you can picture exactly is the first morning. Nobody can picture the two hundredth, and the two hundredth is where you'll be living.

"The new job will fix it"

Now the specific ones, because the hum picks its objects and the job is the commonest. You're not bullied and you're not underpaid, or not badly. You're tired of it. The work has stopped being interesting, or the place has, and you've decided that the tiredness is the job's and would stay behind if you left.

Chapter 3 gave you the two job-change studies and I'll only remind you of the shape. Boswell and colleagues, low before, high immediately after, then down. Chadi and Hetschko, an unusually high lift for people who chose to move, short term only, and no lift at all for people who moved because their workplace closed. The lift was in the choosing.

Now use the chapter 6 test. Does the tiredness have a shape? If it's worse on the days a particular person is in and better when they're not, if it arrived when the work changed in a particular way and would leave if the work changed back, then the job is a cause and a new job is a fix. Change it, and expect the change to hold. If the tiredness is the same across the good weeks and the bad ones, if it was there in the previous job too, if it's really a tiredness with working rather than with this work, then the new job will give you the season and then hand you back the tiredness with a new logo on it.

There's a third case, and it's worth its own paragraph because it's common and hard to see. The job isn't the cause, but the way you're doing it is. You're working long hours out of habit, or you're bringing the work home in your head and giving your family

what's left, and those are patterns that will follow you to the next employer because they're yours and not the job's. Two earlier books in this series, *The work will still be there* and *Leave it at work*, are about those patterns, and if either title makes you wince then the fix you need is in those books and not on the job board.

If you do move, one more thing. The people in Chadi and Hetschko's data who got the lift were the ones who chose to go, and choosing is a thing you can do towards a job as well as away from one. Leaving because of something has a season and then a hangover. Going to something, a particular kind of work you've named and can describe on a Thursday afternoon, is at least a forecast with content in it. Ask which you're doing. If the answer is "because of", you know the shape of what's coming.

"The house will fix it"

The house is the next thing you can see most clearly, and the property site is designed to make sure of that. Three bedrooms. The garden. The kitchen that opens onto it. And the belief behind the search is that the hum is, at least partly, a fact about square footage.

I have less research for this one than for the others, and I'll say so plainly. The Luhmann meta-analysis included relocation among its eight events, and found that events differ in their effects and that how desirable an event is supposed to be doesn't predict what it does. I couldn't get hold of a good study that follows people through a move to a better house and measures their life satisfaction afterwards, and I'm not going to invent one. So what follows is reasoning, using the findings from earlier chapters.

Start with Schkade and Kahneman. What made the students in the Midwest expect Californians to be happier was the climate, which is the feature of California that's easiest to see from Ohio. The house is the same. What you can see from the sofa is the kitchen and the garden, the features that differ most from the flat you're in, and the focusing illusion says those features will get far more weight in your forecast than they'll have in your living. A garden on a Thursday in November is a wet rectangle you can see from the kitchen. The kitchen on a Thursday is where you make the same dinner while thinking about the same email.

Then apply the chapter 6 test. If the flat has a cause in it, the damp, the noise, the third flight of stairs with a pushchair, the forty-minute commute that the new place would cut to ten, then the move removes a cause and it's a fix. Note that every one of those is a specific Thursday-afternoon fact. Now look at your saved search and ask what it's actually filtering for. If the filters are bedrooms and a garden and the feeling of a bigger life, the move is a hope, and the hope is being asked to lift a hum that was there in the last flat too.

The commute is the one to watch, because it cuts both ways. A move that adds twenty minutes each way in exchange for the spare room adds a cause to your Thursday to buy a feature for your outline. I'd guess, and it's a guess, that a fair number of the people on the coast who seem calmer are calmer because they stopped commuting, not because they can see the sea, and the sea is what you notice when you visit.

None of this says don't move. It says the listings are showing you the outline, and your job before you do anything is to write the Thursday. Chapter 18 has the question.

"The right person will fix it"

This one is quieter, because most people don't say it out loud. But it's there, on the bad days, in a relationship that's fine. The thought that with a different person, or with a person at all, the hum would go. That the flatness is a fact about who you come home to.

The marriage study from chapter 7 is the place to start, and this time look at the individual differences rather than the average. Lucas, Clark, Georgellis and Diener found that on average people rose at marriage and adapted back. But the average was made of very different lives. People who reacted strongly at the start were, years later, still far above where they'd been. Others showed trajectories going the opposite way, down through the marriage rather than up. The authors' conclusion was that marriage can be associated with long-lasting changes in satisfaction, in both directions, and that you'd miss this entirely if you only looked at the average.

So the person can matter. The finding isn't that partners don't change anything. It's that a partner isn't a next thing in the sense the rest of this book means, a purchase that lifts you for a season. What a relationship does to the level over years depends on what happens in it, and that's slow and cumulative, and it's the only kind of change in this research that runs both ways.

Lucas's later study of divorce, in the same German panel over eighteen years, adds the uncomfortable half. Satisfaction fell in the years before a divorce and recovered afterwards, but not completely. And people who would go on to divorce were already

less satisfied than those who'd stay married, before either group had married at all. Some of what looks like the relationship's effect on a person was the person, carried in.

Put that beside the hum. If you're carrying a level into a relationship, the relationship will have it in it, and the next relationship will too. That's not a reason to stay in one that's bad. It's a reason to ask, honestly, which you're looking at. A relationship with a cause in it, unkindness, contempt, one row with different costumes that never gets resolved, is a thing to change, and an earlier book in this series, *The same argument again*, is about the last of those. A relationship that's ordinary, in which the hum is present the way it's present at work and in the flat, is not going to be fixed by its replacement. The person who'd fix it is not out there, because the hum isn't about a person.

I'd add one thing that's my own view. Of all the next things, this is the one where the season does the most damage, because a new relationship's season is intense enough to feel like proof, and its wearing off is the moment people decide they chose wrong. If you've done that twice, look at the year-later column before you do it a third time.

"A baby will fix it"

The baby is the next thing people are least willing to say they're expecting to fix anything, and it's also the one with the most research, so I'll be careful and I'll be specific.

The research is mixed, and the people who've done most of it say so. Katherine Nelson, Kostadin Kushlev and Sonja Lyubomirsky reviewed it in 2014 and concluded that whether parents are happier than non-parents is the wrong question. What they found was that parents are less happy to the extent that parenthood brings more negative emotion, money trouble, lost sleep and a strained marriage, and happier to the extent that it brings meaning, the satisfaction of basic needs, positive emotion and a fuller social role. Both sets of things arrive together. The earlier study by Nelson, Kushlev, Tammy English, Elizabeth Dunn and Lyubomirsky found that across three approaches, parents and especially fathers reported more happiness, more positive emotion and more meaning in life than non-parents.

Against that, the panel studies. Clark, Diener, Georgellis and Lucas, in twenty waves of the German data, found complete adaptation in life satisfaction to the birth of a first child. The rise came and went. Ivana Anusic, Stevie Yap and Richard Lucas, in an Australian national panel, found a slight decrease in positive feeling after childbirth and a slight increase in negative feeling, relative to what would have happened anyway. Slight, and in a national sample, and not the scene on the front of the pram catalogue.

What I take from all that is this, and the interpretation is mine. A child changes the outline of a life more than anything else on the list, and it also changes the Thursday more than anything else on the list, and the two changes point in different directions. The outline gains meaning, the thing Nelson's studies keep finding. The Thursday gains sleep loss, money trouble and the end of most of the time you had. If the hum was a level, it will be there in the nursery at three in the morning, with less sleep to fight it. If what you were missing was meaning, a real absence of anything that mattered, then a child might be the rare next thing that's actually a fix, because meaning is a cause and it's one a child does supply.

Which is why this one, above all the others, needs the Thursday question rather than the preview. The preview is a Sunday morning. The Thursday is the one with the nursery drop-off and the work you haven't done and the row about whose turn it is, and a child doesn't stop the hum on that day. What a child does is make the hum matter less, for some people, because there's something in the afternoon that outranks it. Whether you're one of those people is not something the preview can tell you.

"Once I've got enough money"

Money is the next thing behind most of the others. The house needs it, the retirement is made of it, the job is partly about it. And there's a widely repeated finding that money stops mattering above a certain income, which would make this the easy chapter. It isn't the easy chapter, because that finding has been argued over by the people who produced it, and the honest version is more interesting.

The 2006 paper from chapter 5, by Kahneman and colleagues, found people with higher incomes barely happier in their moment-to-moment experience and more tense. Then in 2021 Matthew Killingsworth published a very large study, nearly two million reports from over thirty-three thousand working adults in the United States, who were pinged on their phones through the day and asked how they felt. He found that both how people felt in the moment and how they rated their lives rose steadily with income, with no sign of a plateau at the figure of seventy-five thousand dollars that earlier research had suggested. So two findings pointed in different directions, from two of the most careful researchers in the field.

What happened next is the part I'd want you to remember. Killingsworth, Kahneman and a third researcher, Barbara Mellers, did a joint reanalysis to find out who was right, and published it in 2023. The answer was both, for different people. For the least happy people, the flattening was real. Above a certain income,

more money did nothing for how they felt. For everyone else, happiness kept rising with income, and for the happiest group it rose faster.

Two things follow. The first is that money does matter, and I'm not going to tell you it doesn't. The rise in both Killingsworth papers is with the logarithm of income, which in plain words means each doubling adds about the same amount. Going from twenty thousand to forty thousand does about what going from forty to eighty does. That's a real gain and a steep price for it.

The second is the uncomfortable one for this book's reader. The group for whom more money stopped helping was the unhappy group. If the hum is a level, and it's a low one, then the reconciled finding says money is exactly the next thing that won't reach it. It reaches the people who were already fine. Kahneman's 2006 paper had a phrase for why people get this wrong, and it's the focusing illusion again. When you evaluate a life you focus on conventional achievements, and income is the most conventional of all. It's the easiest feature to see and the one the Thursday afternoon notices least.

What the next thing costs you

So far this has been about whether the next thing works. This chapter is about what it costs while you're waiting for it, because the waiting isn't free, and the costs are the kind that don't show up until you add them.

The first cost is the life in hand. While the hum is attached to the next thing, the current job, the current flat and the current town are the waiting room, and nobody improves a waiting room. You don't put shelves up in a flat you're leaving. You don't learn the job you're going to quit. You don't make friends in the town you'll be gone from in two years, and then it's five years and you have no friends there. The next thing takes the effort that the life in hand needed, and it takes it every year until it arrives, if it arrives.

The second cost is decisions made for the wrong reason. If the move is being asked to fix the hum, then the move gets chosen for its hum-fixing features, the garden and the bigger life, rather than for the things that would actually change a Thursday, the commute and the school and whether the friend in the next town is still in the next town. The next thing, chosen as a hope, is often a worse thing than it would have been if it had been chosen as a fix. You buy the outline and live in the rest.

The third cost is time, and it's the one people notice last. There's a version of this habit where life itself is put on hold until the thing arrives. The holiday will be taken when the promotion's come through. The friends will be had when the move's done. Some of the rest of this series is about a particular form of it, and it would

take a book of its own. I'll only say here that the years spent in the waiting room are years, and they're the same length as the other kind.

The fourth cost falls on other people. A partner who lives with someone waiting for the next thing lives with someone who is, in a quiet way, always leaving. The children are in a house that's temporary. The colleagues have a colleague who's half out the door. Nobody gets the whole of you, because a part of you has already moved, and they can tell.

None of that is an argument against changing your life. It's an argument against the hope. A fix, chosen and done, costs you the effort of doing it and then it's done. A hope costs you a fraction of every year until you either get it and find the hum waiting, or don't and keep waiting. The book turns to method now, and the first step is a question that takes ten minutes and separates the two.

What it does to the things you get

There's one more cost, and it's the strangest, because it falls on the next thing itself. The belief that a change will fix the hum makes the change worse at being what it is.

Think about what the hope asks of the new house. It asks it to be a house, which it can manage, and it asks it to end a discontent that has survived three flats and two jobs, which it can't. So the house arrives with a task it will fail at, and when the season wears off, as chapter 7 says it does for most people, the failure gets charged to the house. The kitchen didn't do it. The garden didn't do it. And now the reader is living in a house that has, in a quiet way, let them down, and the next search starts with a grievance against the place they're in.

A guest who arrives to a house tidied for someone else is welcomed and also, faintly, a disappointment. The house wasn't for them. That's what the next thing walks into.

Kennon Sheldon and Sonja Lyubomirsky tested a model of exactly how the gains from a good change get eroded, following 481 students for three months after a positive change in their lives. Their model has two routes for the erosion. The first is that the good feelings the change produces simply decline over time, the season ending. The second is that aspirations rise. Having got the thing, the person now wants more of it, or the next one, and the gap between what they have and what they want reopens from the wanting side. Both routes were supported by their data.

That second route is the hope at work. The bigger the expectation loaded onto the next thing, the further aspirations have to climb to keep up with it, and the faster the gap reopens. My reading, and it is mine, is that the size of the hope shortens the season. A house chosen as a fix, for the shorter commute, does what it was chosen to do, and the commute stays short, and the house is judged on that and passes. A house chosen as a hope is judged on the hum, and fails within the year, and gets blamed.

The same is true of jobs and partners and towns. A person chosen because they're kind and you like their company can keep being kind. A person chosen to end a flatness that was yours before you met them will be found, in about eighteen months, to have failed at it, and it won't have been their job. The hope doesn't just fail to get what it wants. It spoils what it gets.

There's a good half to this. The same study found two things that slow the erosion, and both are in your hands rather than in the next thing's. That's chapter 19. First, the question.

Fix or hope

Everything in the book so far comes down to one distinction. A fix removes a cause you can name. A hope is expected to remove a feeling. The listings can't tell you which one you're looking at, and neither can the preview, because the preview is the same for both. What tells you is a question, and it needs to be answered in writing, because in your head it will slide back into the preview.

The Thursday question. What, exactly, will be different at four o'clock on a Thursday afternoon? Not the first morning, and not a Sunday. Thursday at four, in the third month, when the season is over and the thing is just the thing. Write down where you'll be, what you'll be doing, and what will be different from where you are and what you're doing at four o'clock this Thursday.

Then look at what you wrote. A fix produces sentences with facts in them. "I'll be home by half past four instead of half past five." "I won't be in the room with the person who shouts." "The baby's room won't have mould on the wall." "I'll be able to walk to see the friend I now drive forty minutes to." Those are causes. Each names a thing that's true now and won't be, and each is a thing you can check in the third month. If the third-month Thursday has them in it, the change worked, whatever the hum is doing.

A hope produces sentences with feelings in them, or nothing. "I'll feel more settled." "It'll feel like a fresh start." "I'll be somewhere that feels like mine." Or the pen stops, because when you try to describe the Thursday all you can find is the feature you saw on the

listing, the garden, and a garden at four on a Thursday in the third month is not different from a wall, it's the thing outside the window while you do what you'd be doing anyway.

The cause test. Having written the Thursday, underline every fact. Then ask of each one whether it's been true in the last two places or the last two jobs. A cause that follows you isn't a cause of the place. If the underlined facts are all things you've had before and the hum survived them, the change is a hope wearing a fix's clothes.

One honest paragraph. Finally write a paragraph that includes the things the preview leaves out. The same job, if you're moving house. The same tiredness, if you're changing job. The same argument, the same phone, the same Thursday. Wilson and Gilbert's finding is that forecasts fail by leaving those out, so put them in on purpose. If the change still looks worth it with the rest of your life written back in, it probably is.

Do this before any big change, and do it for the one you've got lined up now. It takes ten minutes. It's my method and it hasn't been tested as a package. What it's built on, the focusing illusion and the impact bias, has been, and the whole design is to force the forecast to contain a Thursday.

Keep the season

Suppose the next thing passed the test and you did it. Or suppose you did one years ago, and you're now in the house or the job or the relationship and the season has long since worn off. This chapter is about the two things the research suggests slow the wearing off, and neither is a new purchase.

Sheldon and Lyubomirsky's model from chapter 17 named two moderators, two things that stood between a good change and the erosion of its gains. The first was continued appreciation of the original change. The second was continued variety in the experiences the change made possible. In their three-month study of students who'd had a positive change, both slowed the two routes of erosion. The gains lasted longer for people who kept noticing the thing, and for people who kept doing different things with it.

Keep noticing. This is not gratitude as an instruction, which I find useless and which an earlier book in this series, *Thank them now*, had its own reasons for handling carefully. It's narrower and more mechanical. The coat in chapter 7 stopped being noticed because it was worn the same way every day. The house stops being noticed for the same reason. Appreciation, in the sense Sheldon and Lyubomirsky meant it, is deliberately returning attention to the thing that changed, and it can be done once a week in a sentence. On a Thursday, at four, say what's different because of the change. "I'm home already." "There's no shouting in this office." If the

sentence has a fact in it, the change was a fix and the noticing keeps the fix in view. If the sentence has nothing in it, the change was a hope and you've learned something cheaply.

Keep varying. The second moderator is about what you do with the thing. A garden used the same way every weekend becomes the wall outside the window. A garden in which something different is tried, a thing planted, a table moved, a person invited, stays a garden. A new job in which the work is the same by the third month is the old job with a different logo. A new job in which you take the odd task, sit with a different team, learn the thing nobody else wants to learn, keeps being new for longer, and the research suggests the newness is what the season was made of.

Notice that neither of these is available from the sofa. Both are things you do to the life in hand, whether it arrived last month or ten years ago. Which is the point. The season isn't a property of getting the thing. It's a property of how the thing is held, and a thing held with attention and used in varied ways keeps more of its season than a thing acquired and left to become ordinary. That's the closest the research comes to telling you how to make a next thing last, and it turns out to be advice about Thursdays.

Improve the life in hand

The last method chapter is the one the hope has been keeping you from, which is doing something to the life you've got. If the hum is a level, the next thing won't reach it. What might is duller and closer, and the research on wellbeing has been pointing at the same few things for years.

Find the ordinary causes. Before the next thing gets any more of your evenings, look at the Thursday you actually have for causes that don't need a move. The commute you could change without changing the house. The sleep you're not getting. The friend in the next town you haven't seen since the spring. The work you're bringing home in your head. The phone that eats the evening the listings live in. Each of those is a cause, in the chapter 18 sense, a nameable thing that's true now and could be made not true, and each one changes a Thursday at four without a removal van. Most of them are also the subjects of earlier books in this series, and the point of the series is that each is a habit with a fix.

Use what's known to help. The NHS lists five things the evidence supports for mental wellbeing, and none of them is a purchase. Connecting with other people. Being physically active. Learning new skills. Giving to others. And paying attention to the present moment. The page is plain and the list is old, and I include it because the hum has an answer to every item on it, which is "I'll do that when things are settled". The list is what you do instead of waiting for things to be settled. Pick the one you're doing least.

Do one thing for a month. Not all of them. One. Choose the ordinary cause or the item from the list that would change the most Thursdays, and do it for a month before the next thing gets another evening. If it's the commute, ask about the earlier train. If it's the friend, book the Thursday. If it's the sleep, that's an earlier book too. If you find you want a plan for the month and you've made wishes before that didn't survive a wet week, another book in this series, *A wish isn't a plan*, is about how to build the kind that does.

At the end of the month, ask the Thursday question about the life in hand. What's different at four on a Thursday from a month ago? If there's a fact in the answer, you've done what the next thing was going to be asked to do, and you did it without the season and without the hangover. If there isn't, you've spent a month and learned that the cause wasn't that one. Either way you've stopped waiting, and stopping waiting is the change that the research on adaptation suggests might reach the level. The next thing might still be right. It'll be chosen by someone with a Thursday worth staying in, and that's a different person from the one on the sofa at nine.

The decision

Everything so far comes down to one decision. It isn't to stop wanting things, and it isn't to stay where you are. It's this.

No next thing gets to be a hope.

Any big change, the job, the house, the move, the person, the child, the retirement, has to pass the Thursday question in writing before it gets another evening of your attention. If it produces facts, it's a fix, and you go towards it as clearly as you like. If it produces feelings, it goes back on the shelf, and the month goes to the life in hand instead. You lose nothing by this. A real fix answers the question easily. It's only the hopes that can't, and the hopes were never going to work.

Here's how I'd set it up.

Tonight, take the next thing you've got lined up and write its Thursday. Four o'clock, third month, where you'll be and what will be different. Underline the facts. Run the cause test. Write the honest paragraph with the rest of your life put back in. Then decide, from what's on the page and not from the preview, which it is.

If it's a fix, plan it. If it's a hope, close the search for a month and choose the one improvement from chapter 20. Put the month's end date in the diary, with the Thursday question next to it.

Plans of the form "when this happens, then I'll do that" have a good record in research on habits. Peter Gollwitzer and Paschal Sheeran reviewed ninety-four studies of them in 2006 and found that people who fix in advance what they'll do at a particular moment follow through far more often than people who only hold the intention. So write three.

"When I notice I've opened the listings or the job board, I'll ask what four o'clock on Thursday looks like there, out loud, and then decide whether to keep reading."

"When I catch the if-only, I'll finish the sentence with a fact or drop it."

"When someone tells me about their next thing and I feel the hum stir, I'll ask them what a Thursday's like."

What to expect. This is my expectation and not a finding. The first Thursday question will be uncomfortable, because the next thing you've got lined up has probably been a hope for a while and the page will show it. The listings will still pull at nine for weeks, because the hum will still be there and the listings are where it's been going. That's an urge, not an instruction, and you can have it without acting on it. By the end of the month, if you chose the improvement well, one Thursday afternoon will be different in a way you can name, and it'll be the first change in years that you didn't have to wait for. Phillippa Lally and her colleagues found that new behaviours become automatic over weeks and months rather than days, and that a missed day didn't set people back much. Expect the same shape here. The question gets easier to ask each time, and one evening back on the listings doesn't undo it.

The hum may not go. I want to be honest about that, because the research says levels are partly temperament and partly what's happened to you, and a book can't reach either. What changes is what the hum is allowed to do. It stops being a destination and goes back to being weather, and you get on with the afternoon underneath it.

Mid-move, the partner who wants it, the bad situation, the first job, retirement, the baby, and when it's more than the hum

Some situations need the argument adjusted. Here are the ones I'd expect, each in turn.

You've already committed. The offer's accepted or the contract's exchanged, and this book has arrived too late to be a question and too early to be a comfort. Do the Thursday question anyway, for the thing you're moving into. Whatever it shows, you've now got a list of what will and won't be different, and that's the list that keeps the season from spoiling into blame. Then read chapter 19 in the first week, not the third month. The season is the moment to set up the noticing and the variety, and most people set them up never. If you find you're going round the decision itself, whether to pull out, an earlier book in this series, *Pick one*, is about that loop and this one isn't.

Your partner is the one who wants it. Then the Thursday question is a conversation and not a page, and it's a kinder one than "I don't want to move". Ask them to describe their Thursday in the new place, and describe yours, and look at the two together for facts. Often one of you has a cause and the other has a hope, and that's a real difference worth finding before the van comes. If the same move has come up every year in different clothes, that's not about the house, and The same argument again is the book.

You're in a genuinely bad situation. A job that's harming you, a home that's unsafe, a partner who is unkind or controlling.

Chapter 2 said it and I'll say it again. Those are causes, the change is a fix, and nothing in this book is a reason to stay and improve your outlook. Go. If there's fear in the relationship, the NHS has a page on domestic abuse with the national helpline on it, and that comes before any question about Thursdays.

You haven't had a first job or home yet. Then some of the next things on your list are the ordinary first ones, and getting a first job or a first flat removes causes you can name, not having money and not having a door. Those are fixes. What this book is warning about is the second and third, where the first didn't end the hum and the next one is expected to. Watch for that, and you'll have saved yourself the three-flat version of chapter 1.

Retirement is the next thing. It's on Luhmann's list of events, and the honest finding is that its effects vary and don't follow from how good it's supposed to be. The Thursday question is unusually useful here, because a retired Thursday at four is a real thing that can be written and most people don't write it. If the page has facts on it, the walk, the grandchild, the thing you'll build, it's a fix for the causes of the working week. If the page is empty apart from "not working", the hum will be there at four with more room.

The baby is the next thing. Chapter 14 is the whole answer, and the one line I'd repeat is that a child is a fix for an absence of meaning and not for a level, and that you should write the Thursday with the three a.m. in it.

It's more than the hum. If the flatness has been there most of the day, most days, for a fortnight or more, if you've lost interest in things you used to enjoy, if you're sleeping badly and can't get going, the NHS lists those as symptoms of depression and says to see a GP. Depression makes every next thing look like the answer and makes the life in hand look worse than it is, and the fix for that isn't on the listings. Get seen first. The book will keep.

When you were back on the listings at nine

It's a month later, or three, and it's nine at night, and the tab is open again. The search has three bedrooms and a garden in it. You've been in it for twenty minutes and you've felt the minute and a half of living somewhere else two or three times, and now you've noticed, and the noticing has brought the whole book with it, and the thought that you've undone it.

You haven't. Look at what actually happened. The hum arrived, because it does, and it went to where it's always gone, because that's where the groove is. Lally's study found that a missed day didn't do much to a habit being formed, and I'd extend that to an evening on the listings, which is the same thing in this book's terms. The rule was never that you'd stop looking. It was that no next thing gets to be a hope. Looking isn't hoping. Hoping is the sentence, "if only I lived there", and you can look at a kitchen without saying it.

So ask which belief got you back here, because it's usually one. If it's "this one will be different", chapter 3 and your list. If it's the friend on the coast, chapter 5. If it's a bad week that made the life in hand look like the cause, chapter 6 and the test for whether the hum has a shape. If the month's improvement didn't produce a fact and you've decided that proves nothing works, chapter 8, and pick the next improvement rather than the next house.

Then do the one thing that turns a lapse into a use. Take the house on the screen and write its Thursday, there, now, four o'clock in the third month. If it comes up with facts, good, you might have found

a fix, and looking at nine was how. If it comes up with a feeling, close it, and say the honest paragraph to yourself, the same job and the same tiredness in a different kitchen.

Don't count the evenings. Counting is the hope keeping score in a new way. The question is whether the Thursday question has become the thing you ask, and one evening on the listings, if you asked it, is the habit working and not the habit failing.

Thursday, four o'clock

It's a Thursday. Nothing has arrived. The job is the job, the flat is the flat, and the search is still saved, because you didn't delete it and there was no need to. It's four in the afternoon and you're in the life in hand.

What's different is small. The train is the earlier one, because you asked, and you're home at half past four. That's a fact and it was on the page a month ago. The friend in the next town is coming on Saturday, because you booked it on the Thursday after you read chapter 20, and she said yes in four minutes, which was its own small lesson. The garden is the same garden. You put a chair in it, and the chair is where you sat last Thursday, and the wall outside the window turned out to have a bit of sun on it at this hour.

The hum is there. I said it might be and it is, lower than it was on the bad weeks and not gone, and it's the weather now, not the address. You've stopped asking it where you should move to. You've started asking it what it wants at four o'clock, and the answer is usually a walk or a phone call or the thing you've been putting off, and none of those needs a van.

Tonight, at nine, you'll probably open something. If it's the listings, ask the question. If a house comes up whose Thursday has facts in it, a ten-minute walk to the school, a room for the parent who's coming to live with you, you'll know what you're looking at, and you can go towards it clearly, and the season will come and the

noticing will keep it, and the third month will be judged on the facts and pass. That's what a fix looks like from the far side. It's not smaller than the hope. It's just true.

One action. Before you close this book, write the Thursday for the next thing you've got lined up. Four o'clock, third month, facts underlined. Then read it back and decide, from the page, which it is. That's the whole method, and it's the same ten minutes whether the answer is go or stay.

Notes

These notes give the sources behind the claims in each chapter, and say where I'm giving my own interpretation. The book isn't medical advice, and it isn't advice about whether you should move, change jobs or leave a relationship. If you're low most of the day, most days, for a fortnight or more, the NHS says to see a GP. The examples throughout, the property site at nine, the spare room, the promotion that came with a new manager, the forty-minute commute, the friend in the next town, are invented to illustrate and aren't drawn from real people.

Studies were checked on 26 September 2026 by reading their published abstracts, and for two of them the full abstract text from the journal record. None was read in full, and none carried a retraction or correction notice at that date. Several are panel studies, which follow the same people over years and are better than a single survey at showing change, but which still describe averages and can't say what will happen to any one reader, and I've tried to say so each time.

Chapter 1. No sources. The terms are the book's own.

Chapter 2. No research sources. The claim that some changes are fixes is the book's argument, developed in chapter 18.

Chapter 3. Boswell, Boudreau and Tichy, "The relationship between employee job change and job satisfaction: the honeymoon-hangover effect", *Journal of Applied Psychology* 90, 2005, pages 882 to 892. The abstract says "a sample of managers"

and gives no number. Chadi and Hetschko, "The magic of the new: how job changes affect job satisfaction", Journal of Economics and Management Strategy 27, 2018, pages 23 to 39. German panel data. The claim that the season belongs to the choosing rather than the job is my reading of the plant-closure comparison.

Chapter 4. Schkade and Kahneman, "Does living in California make people happy? A focusing illusion in judgments of life satisfaction", Psychological Science 9, 1998, pages 340 to 346. Large samples of students, the abstract gives no number. The earlier book referred to is The good old days had problems too.

Chapter 5. Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz and Stone, "Would you be happier if you were richer? A focusing illusion", Science 312, 2006, pages 1908 to 1910. The earlier book referred to is You only saw the good bits. What the friend on the coast would say is my illustration.

Chapter 6. Diener, Lucas and Scollon, "Beyond the hedonic treadmill: revising the adaptation theory of well-being", American Psychologist 61, 2006, pages 305 to 314. A review. The distinction between a hum with a shape and a level, and the test for it, are mine and haven't been tested.

Chapter 7. Luhmann, Hofmann, Eid and Lucas, "Subjective well-being and adaptation to life events: a meta-analysis", Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 102, 2012, pages 592 to 615. 188 publications, 313 samples, 65,911 people. Lucas, Clark, Georgellis and Diener, "Reexamining adaptation and the set point model of

happiness: reactions to changes in marital status", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 84, 2003, pages 527 to 539. A 15-year panel of over 24,000 people in Germany. The coat is mine.

Chapter 8. Lucas, "Adaptation and the set-point model of subjective well-being: does happiness change after major life events?", *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 16, 2007, pages 75 to 79. A review. Lucas, Clark, Georgellis and Diener, "Unemployment alters the set point for life satisfaction", *Psychological Science* 15, 2004, pages 8 to 13. The same German panel. The observation that the lasting changes are mostly losses is my reading of Lucas's list, and the advice to protect rather than chase follows from it and is mine.

Chapter 9. No research sources. The definition of content and the distinction between settling and choosing are mine.

Chapter 10. Wilson and Gilbert, "Affective forecasting: knowing what to want", *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 14, 2005, pages 131 to 134. A review. Gilbert, Pinel, Wilson, Blumberg and Wheatley, "Immune neglect: a source of durability bias in affective forecasting", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 75, 1998, pages 617 to 638. Six studies. That the same machinery shortens good feelings is my extension, though it follows the authors' own account of adaptation.

Chapter 11. Boswell and colleagues, and Chadi and Hetschko, as above. The earlier books referred to are *The work will still be there* and *Leave it at work*. The distinction between leaving because of and going to is mine.

Chapter 12. Luhmann and colleagues, as above, for relocation as one of the eight events. Schkade and Kahneman, as above. I looked for a study following people through a move to better housing and found Nakazato, Schimmack and Oishi 2011 in Social Indicators Research, but no abstract was available to me and I make no claim from it. The reasoning about commutes and gardens is mine.

Chapter 13. Lucas, Clark, Georgellis and Diener 2003, as above. Lucas, "Time does not heal all wounds: a longitudinal study of reaction and adaptation to divorce", Psychological Science 16, 2005, pages 945 to 950. An 18-year panel of more than 30,000 people in Germany. The earlier book referred to is The same argument again. The claim about the season of a new relationship doing the most damage is my view.

Chapter 14. Nelson, Kushlev and Lyubomirsky, "The pains and pleasures of parenting: when, why, and how is parenthood associated with more or less well-being?", Psychological Bulletin 140, 2014, pages 846 to 895. A review. Nelson, Kushlev, English, Dunn and Lyubomirsky, "In defense of parenthood: children are associated with more joy than misery", Psychological Science 24, 2013, pages 3 to 10. Three studies. Clark, Diener, Georgellis and Lucas, "Lags and leads in life satisfaction: a test of the baseline hypothesis", Economic Journal 118, 2008. The abstract I read was the 2007 working paper's. Anusic, Yap and Lucas, "Does personality moderate reaction and adaptation to major life events? Analysis of life satisfaction and affect in an Australian national sample", Journal of Research in Personality 51, 2014, pages 69 to 77. The reading that a child is a fix for an absence of meaning and not for a level is mine.

Chapter 15. Kahneman and colleagues 2006, as above.

Killingsworth, "Experienced well-being rises with income, even above \$75,000 per year", Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 118, 2021, article e2016976118. 1,725,994 reports from 33,391 employed adults in the United States. Killingsworth, Kahneman and Mellers, "Income and emotional well-being: a conflict resolved", Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 120, 2023, article e2208661120. The plain-words account of the logarithm as "each doubling adds about the same" is my gloss and the exact shape is in the papers.

Chapter 16. No research sources. The four costs are my observations. The book on putting life on hold until something arrives isn't yet written.

Chapter 17. Sheldon and Lyubomirsky, "The challenge of staying happier: testing the Hedonic Adaptation Prevention model", Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 38, 2012, pages 670 to 680. 481 students over three months. The claim that the size of the hope shortens the season is my extension of their aspiration route and hasn't been tested. The guest is mine.

Chapter 18. Wilson and Gilbert, and Schkade and Kahneman, as above, for what the method is built on. The Thursday question, the cause test and the honest paragraph are my method and haven't been tested as a package.

Chapter 19. Sheldon and Lyubomirsky, as above, for the two moderators. The earlier book referred to is Thank them now. What noticing and varying look like in a house or a job is my suggestion.

Chapter 20. The NHS page "5 steps to mental wellbeing", at nhs.uk, read on 26 September 2026. The earlier book referred to is A wish isn't a plan. The month is my suggestion.

Chapter 21. Gollwitzer and Sheeran, "Implementation intentions and goal achievement: a meta-analysis of effects and processes", *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 38, 2006, pages 69 to 119. Lally, van Jaarsveld, Potts and Wardle, "How are habits formed: modelling habit formation in the real world", *European Journal of Social Psychology* 40, 2010, pages 998 to 1009. 96 volunteers, 82 with usable data. The rule hasn't been tested and what I say to expect is my expectation.

Chapter 22. Luhmann and colleagues, as above, for retirement. The NHS pages on the symptoms of depression in adults and on domestic abuse, at nhs.uk, read on 26 September 2026. The earlier books referred to are Pick one and The same argument again.

Chapter 23. Lally and colleagues, as above. The extension from a missed day to an evening on the listings is mine.

Looked up and not used. Brickman, Coates and Janoff-Bulman's 1978 study of lottery winners is the one most often cited on this subject and rests on 22 winners. An earlier book in this series says why it's overstated, and it isn't cited here. Nakazato, Schimmack and Oishi 2011 on moving house, as noted under chapter 12. Kahneman and Deaton's 2010 paper on the income plateau is cited only through the 2023 reconciliation, since that paper reanalyses it. Cooney, Gilbert and Wilson's 2017 paper on the novelty penalty came up in searching and is about telling stories, not living them.