

Life Style

Ravi set down his coffee with a sigh, as though the day itself was weighing on him. He cracked his knuckles and went to turn on his computer. On the screen, there was a pink sticky note. It said, "See me - Marion." He took another sip of his scalding hot coffee, then the 15 steps to the office of his editor-in-chief. She was on the phone, but she waved him in without looking up. She pointed at the chair and gestured for Ravi to close the door. He sat down stiffly and fidgeted while she wrapped up her call. He had flagged down countless executives and politicians, yet meeting with Marion was more stressful.

"I assume you know why you're here," she said dryly. "Your last piece put us in a difficult position."

"The councilman lied, Marion. That was the story. Isn't that what we do here? Tell the story even when it isn't convenient?" Ravi countered.

"We tell the story when it is accurate. We tell it after verification. You rushed it."

"I had a source."

"You had a rumor with a business card," she said. "We barely survived the retraction."

"So that's it?" Ravi said.

"It's not just one thing, it's becoming a pattern—".

"Years of staying late, writing—" Ravi said.

She folded her hands on the desk, fingers drumming once, eyes flicking up to meet his, then away.

"We are reassigning you."

"Reassigning?" he asked, dazed.

"Lifestyle."

For a second, he wondered if he'd misheard her. Lifestyle was where reporters went when they couldn't handle real stories — restaurant openings, holiday gift guides, trend pieces about people with too much money.

It wasn't where you sent someone who had spent a decade chasing corruption through city hall basements.

“You’re...” He laughed, taken aback. “You’re kidding, right?” His desk had once been a battleground of FOIA requests, subpoenas, and empty coffee cups, all evidence of chasing stories no one wanted told. He imagined a future where those were replaced by cutesy stationery and matcha lattes.

“I want you to slow down and reconnect with people who aren’t whistleblowers or crazy.” She hesitated. “I want you to remember why you started writing in the first place.”

“By writing how-to guides?”

“By listening, something you used to be really good at.”

“So this is a punishment?”

“Think of this as a reset.”

“How long?”

“We’ll talk in a few months, see where you are.”

“And if I say no?”

“Then you can feel free to find another job.” She paused and smiled slightly. “But I’d rather not lose you. You’re one of the best investigative reporters I’ve ever seen, when you’re not busy burning yourself alive over an invisible deadline.”

“Lifestyle,” he said, letting the word hang.

“Ravi, if you let it, it could be good for you.”

He got up. “Yeah.” He stopped. “We’ll see.” He turned to leave.

Ravi trudged up the three flights of stairs to lifestyle. Immediately, the layout of the pod was very different; the space was more open, there were lots of plants, and people were chatting with one another. He squinted as his eyes adjusted to all the light. It was a stark contrast to the newsroom downstairs, where the only notable smell was burnt coffee. A middle-aged woman with glasses and short hair walked over and introduced herself as Beth.

Ravi automatically cataloged details. Ink stain on her right thumb, a steaming cup of green tea, and a pair of reading glasses perched comfortably on her head instead of her face. Copy editor, he guessed before she said it. The sort of person who notices a missing comma from 20 paces away.

She smiled easily, though, which threw him off. Most editors he knew smiled like they were apologizing for something.

“You must be that investigative journalist. Wonderful to meet you. I’m a copy editor, so you’ll answer to me. You’ll work on a variety of topics. We have pitch meetings every Tuesday. Your desk is there, along with your first assignments,” she said while gesturing to a small table. “Do you have any questions?”

He opened his mouth, then closed it again.

“I don’t,” he said.

Ravi walked over to his desk. A thick manila folder sat atop it, along with a dictaphone and a laptop. He opened up the folder while he gulped down the rest of his coffee, not really tasting it. Inside were assignment briefs—deadlines, word counts, meeting schedules—and a fresh stack of business cards. He turned one over. ‘Ravi Trivedi: Lifestyle Feature Writer’ instead of ‘Ravi Trivedi: Investigative Reporter.’ But, like any other day, he still powered up his computer. The first assignment involved something called a “community run club,” which sounded suspiciously like voluntary suffering.

The next day, Ravi met the running group at dawn, regretting everything. The leader of the running group, a wiry woman with a voice like a whistle and a reflective vest that cut through the morning fog, launched straight in.

“As you all know, all paces are welcome here. That being said, most beginners start too fast,” she said, jogging in place.

He wrote that down because that was his job now, apparently.

She guided them through a slow loop around the reservoir. He kept pace more out of spite than fitness. But, as they ran, he found himself admiring the morning sunlight catching on the water, asking questions beyond the ones he’d prepared—about pacing, about breathing, and about why people stick with running.

The coach grinned. “Because you get out what you put in.”

Ravi pretended not to find that interesting, but he wrote it down anyway, making sure the quote was clean.

Ravi ate a late breakfast at the counter, scrolling through the news out of habit, but he set his phone facedown and finished the last few bites without it. Then he sat down and began typing up the running piece. He intended to stick with his planned structure, of going from training plans to beginner mistakes to injury prevention and other tips, but his fingers kept drifting back to something the coach said about “learning to sit with discomfort rather than sprinting away from it.”

He deleted the line twice.

Then he added it back in.

Not because it was sentimental, but because it was true.

The running piece took him most of the afternoon to finish. The next morning, he had another assignment. A bakery profile across town. He took the subway to a tiny bakery, sandwiched between a laundromat and a florist.

The building smelled like warm fruit and fancy butter. Ravi sat across from a man who spoke about laminated dough with the gusto of an academic defending their thesis. Ravi asked his prepared questions, and the baker answered generously. Ravi struggled to keep up. The people he was used to interviewing were tight-lipped, but he had to keep his pen flying to get down everything the baker said.

At one point, the baker offered him a croissant that had split slightly at the seam. “Still tastes good,” he said. Ravi hesitated, then took a bite. The layers shattered softly, buttery and faintly sweet, leaving flakes on his notebook. He brushed them away absently, already writing again.

On the ride back to the newsroom, he went back over his notes. Tucked between measurements and flour substitutions was a quote, underlined and circled twice: *baking is the only place in my life where patience actually pays off*. He stared at it for a bit longer than the others, then copied it into a fresh page, separate from the rest.

He didn’t use it, but he did not delete it either.

At home, he googled “laminated dough” and skimmed the first article detailing the process of folding a block of butter in between sheets of dough, and immediately closed the tab. He didn’t own a rolling pin. He didn’t plan to acquire one. Still, later, he found

himself in his kitchen, pressing two sticks of butter together with the back of a spoon, just to see how soft they were. They were not soft. He put them back in the fridge and washed the spoon.

The Tuesday morning pitch meeting had finally rolled around. Everyone in the pod gathered around a large, oblong table. Beth arrived late, mug in hand.

“Okay. Elevator pitches. Ravi, you’re up,” she said, shuffling papers.

Ravi cleared his throat. “Uh...maybe a piece on...” He glanced at his notes, all blank. “One about how morning routines are getting out of hand?”

Beth stared at him.

“Or—” Ravi said quickly. “An article about corruption in the sparkling water industry.”

“Ravi,” she said. “These are not pitches.”

He bristled. “You told me to pitch lifestyle content. This is lifestyle content.”

“It’s lifestyle content you resent,” she shot back. “Give me something you actually want to write.” Ravi stayed quiet. Beth exhaled. “Right. Stick to your assigned briefs for now.”

That afternoon, Ravi skimmed a few lifestyle pieces, telling himself it was just to get a sense of tone. Most of it annoyed him — the lists, the conversational tone, the casual authority — but he read more than he meant to. One article mentioned adding greens to smoothies “for energy.” He scoffed and bookmarked anyway. At home, he threw spinach, a banana, and water into a blender and let it run too long. The result was thick, vaguely grassy, and had an eerie frothiness about it. He drank it standing at the counter, his phone face down to the right. The next morning, he made it again, this time with less spinach and almond milk instead of water.

Later that morning, Ravi stood at the edge of the community garden plot, notebook in hand, pretending that the sun wasn’t too bright. The gardener, a man in his 60s wearing rubber clogs and a faded baseball cap, knelt beside a tomato plant.

“Thanks for meeting with me,” Ravi said. “I just need a few quotes for a piece on urban gardening trends.”

The gardener didn’t look up.

“I am supposed to highlight how gardening reduces stress,” Ravi tried. “Do you… find that to be true?”

The gardener stood, wiping his hands. “I find it honest,” he said. “Plants tell you exactly how they are doing. Most people don’t.”

Ravi wasn’t sure if that last comment was aimed at him. He cleared his throat and asked, “And what would you say to a beginner who wants to get into gardening?”

“Start small,” the man said. “One pot, one plant. Don’t try to grow the whole world at once. It’ll die.” He pointed at a wilting basil plant. “Like that one.”

Ravi wrote it down. His handwriting was tight.

The gardener studied Ravi for a moment. “You don’t really care about gardening, do you?”

“Erm… thank you for your time, sir,” Ravi said, forcing a polite smile. “I care about getting the piece done.”

“Same thing,” the gardener said, turning back to his plants. “You show up. Put in the work. Doesn’t matter if you love it yet.”

Ravi paused, his pen hovering above his pad.

“Anything else you want readers to know?” Ravi asked, trying to keep his voice neutral.

“Sure.” The man clipped off a stalk of thyme and pressed it into Ravi’s hand. “Smell that. That is why people garden. Not for articles, but for moments.”

Ravi hesitated, then brought the thyme to his face. It was brighter than he expected; herbaceous and peppery and sharp.

Ravi didn’t write down what the man said, but he didn’t let it go either.

The thyme lived on Ravi’s desk for two days in a paper cup with some water. When it wilted, he felt a small, unreasonable pang of guilt. On his way home, he bought a potted basil plant from a sidewalk stand. He told himself it was for “set dressing” in case he needed a photo for a future article. He placed it near his window and forgot

about it for three days, then went back to check if it was still alive, and moved it closer to the window before he could stop himself.

The next week, Ravi stepped into the bistro's kitchen just as the morning light hit the bespoke oak counters. The chef had already arranged an array of colorful squashes and leeks on the counter, and she greeted him with a smile that made him instinctively straighten his notebook.

"We're making a savory galette today," she said as she removed a very large amount of butter from the freezer. "Seasonal vegetables, a touch of cheese, and a nice crimped edge."

Ravi raised his eyebrows. She started by cutting pieces of butter into her dough, then adding some water, before putting it into the fridge. Ravi took careful notes, but he stopped to watch as she chopped the leeks and squash and sweated them down in a cast-iron pan that looked like it had been in use for the better part of Ravi's life. She rolled out the dough and laid out all the vegetables into a beautiful and colorful spiral. He furiously drafted her recipe in his notebook, listening to her talk about all the iterations of the dough and the effects of oven temperature.

Once it was baked, Ravi checked his notes and asked the chef about reorganizing the steps, thinking about how someone unfamiliar with the kitchen might struggle, smoothing transitions, and suggesting adaptations for seasonal ingredients. He hung onto every word she said, incorporating each piece of new information.

That night, he reorganized his pantry. Not aggressively. Not in a life-changing way. He just moved spices he used more often to the front and threw out a can of beans that expired during a different presidential administration.

The next day, back at the newsroom, Ravi transcribed his dictaphone and wrote a draft. Beth came over to his desk to check on him. "This is good work, Ravi. Very thorough. Publishable. Very readable," she said, looking over his shoulder.

Ravi tried to deflect, but his cheeks flushed a revealing shade of crimson. Once the piece went live, he clicked on the first comment: 'First dough I've ever made, and

my in-laws loved it. I'm never going back to Pillsbury again.' Ravi read it twice and let out his breath.

Several weeks later, Marion slid by his desk, carrying a folder and a half-smile. "Ravi, there is an opening back in investigative. I think you'd kill it, going back to stories with a real impact. Are you interested?"

"I...Thank you, Marion," he said slowly. "But, I think I'll pass."

Her eyebrows lifted, surprised but approvingly. "You've changed," she said.

He smiled, a quiet, genuine smile. "Yeah. And I like it."

He turned his business card over, running his fingers along it, proudly displaying it at the corner of his desk. He wasn't chasing scandal or corruption. He was shaping experiences that people could try, taste, and feel. And that was enough.