

# THE BUT I WILL ERA

*Naomi Shiels*

Book Two of The Momentum Series

Wild Hearts Publishing Australia

## SAMPLE CHAPTERS

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## Disclaimer

This book isn't medical advice, therapy, or a replacement for professional help. It won't heal trauma, fix your nervous system, or replace therapy. And while solving capitalism would be great, the author is happy to join anyone working on that.

But this book might help you stop overthinking decisions you've already made, cut down on second-guessing, stick with your plans more often, and even laugh at yourself in a surprisingly helpful way.

In these pages, you'll find practical tools and strategies for people with busy, messy lives. Each chapter gives you simple things to try, even on your most difficult days. The goal isn't just to inspire you, but to give you real ways to move forward, no extra hours or big life changes required.

If you're struggling with serious mental health issues, please reach out to professional support. On the other hand, if you're just tired of talking yourself out of things you care about, you're in the right spot. Pull up a chair, and let's jump in.

## Foreword

*By Professor Lionel P. Hardwicke, Chair of Applied Follow-Through Studies, The Institute*

It is with considerable professional interest and a mild sense of relief that I introduce *The But I Will Era*.

For over twenty years, my colleagues and I have studied what happens after people begin things. Not the beginning itself, which has been documented exhaustively by an industry that appears constitutionally incapable of moving past it. What interests us is what comes next. The morning after the decision. The third week. The sixth. The calm Tuesday when the thing is still there, still waiting, and the person who was so certain in January is now renegotiating the terms of their own commitment from the couch.

Our results have been remarkably consistent. You do not fail because you are afraid. You fail because you become bored, slightly bothered, or distracted by a thought that begins with I could just. This phenomenon is known in academic circles as Post-Initiation Drift. In layperson's terms: the wheels come off quietly. The subject will often report that nothing is wrong, per se. They may even insist they are still committed. Yet, collected observations suggest they are now strongly committed in reorganising their desk, researching alternative approaches, or formulating a comprehensive new system that will work better than the previous one.

The thing, meanwhile, remains exactly where they left it. What makes this pattern so resistant to intervention is not laziness. I want to be precise about this because the field has done considerable damage by conflating the two. The people who drift, in my experience, are among the most motivated at the outset. They care enormously. They start with genuine intention. The drift happens not because the caring stopped, but because nobody told them what caring looks like when the feeling is gone. Nobody prepared them for the specific, unglamorous, deeply unremarkable experience of continuing when nothing dramatic is happening, no one is applauding, and the results are arriving so slowly they are functionally invisible.

That is the gap this book fills.

Not the heroic start. Not the triumphant finish. The middle, where progress becomes repetitive, praise evaporates, and one is compelled to face the alarming truth that the thing now requires consistency rather than inspiration.

What distinguishes this work from others in the field is its refusal to dramatise this stage. There are no rousing speeches about grit. No demands for radical self-reinvention. No instructions to wake at 4 am unless you already do that and enjoy it, in which case, carry on, and potentially seek professional guidance.

Instead, the author presents a proposition that is radical precisely because of how quiet it is: that follow-through is not a personality trait but a habit. That the people who finish things are not a different kind of person. They have simply learned, through repetition and occasional

humiliation, to stop negotiating with themselves like a malfunctioning committee and start honouring decisions as if they were made by someone worth listening to.

Which they were.

I will admit, and this is somewhat unusual for a foreword, that I am no longer entirely objective on this subject. My reasons for saying so will become apparent in the Afterword. Suffice it to say that the research has a way of becoming personal when you pay close attention, and I have been paying close attention.

To the reader holding this book: if you have started something and found yourself here, in the middle, wondering what happened to the person who began so confidently, I want you to know something before you read a single chapter.

You are not behind. You are not broken. You are not evidence that the thing was wrong for you, or that you are wrong for the thing.

You are simply in the part that nobody made a course about. The part

that does not have a highlight reel. This is the part where the only available move is the quiet, slightly stubborn, entirely unglamorous decision to continue.

This book is about that decision.

On behalf of the Institute, I can confirm: this era is long overdue.

*Professor Lionel P. Hardwicke Chair of Applied Follow-Through Studies, The Institute*

## Author's Note

This book is written for a specific person. That person has started something. They meant it. They showed up in the beginning when the decision was new, and the feeling was real, and the version of themselves they were becoming felt suddenly, briefly, completely possible. And then somewhere in the middle, they drifted.

Not dramatically.

Quietly.

The thing ended up in a corner. The week got away from them. Monday started to feel like the answer to a question that the thing kept asking. Life just got in the way. And the years have a way of passing while that's happening.

If that is you, this book was written specifically for you. Not a version of you that is more motivated, more disciplined, or more ready. The version that is here, now, slightly tired, very aware that the thing is still in the corner.

If that is not you, this book will probably feel like someone else's therapy session. Interesting, possibly. Directly useful, less so. Book One or Book Three might be looking for you instead.

For everyone else: this is a book about steadiness. About learning to honour decisions without needing to feel enthusiastic about them every day. About what comes after starting, which nobody tells you about, and what it takes to stay when staying is the whole unglamorous job.

I know this because I have lived it. I have sat at a screen at 9 pm with sore eyes, a depleted tank, and a flat brain, negotiating a very reasonable case for tomorrow. I have had eighteen projects in motion simultaneously, written in the margins of a full life, on the days when showing up meant one sentence, one paragraph, one open file and a single changed word. I have done this while working full-time, raising children, running a household, and carrying things that do not belong in a productivity framework, but show up in your life anyway, uninvited, requiring everything you have. And they did require everything I had.

So, I speak from experience. I am not speaking from a place of BS, trying to get someone to read my book. I have lived this. I know every inch of what this feels like. If you're reading this exhausted, you're exactly who this is for. I did not finish those projects because I was always motivated. I finished them because I decided once and kept honouring it, even on days when the feeling was completely gone. I have many projects still in motion. They will stay in motion. And they will be finished.

That is what this book is about.

My brother died when I was 24 years old. Afterwards, I needed something to hold onto. Not wisdom. Not inspiration. Just a reason to get up and keep moving on the days when moving appeared impossible. I found it in the simplest truth I could name.

Two legs and a heartbeat is enough.

I made that up. For myself. In the early days of grief, when the qualification for showing up needed to be that basic, because anything more complicated was beyond me. It carried me through the first two years. It still carries me on the days that ask too much.

It is still the whole qualification. It was enough to begin. It is enough to continue.

Once you've started, the question changes. It is no longer: can I begin, even when I'm scared?  
It becomes: can I continue, even when nothing dramatic is happening?

This book is about that shift. Not the kind that requires hype, grit speeches, or a new identity.  
The quieter one, in which progress becomes repetitive, and results arrive slowly, and the  
feeling that got you started has packed its bags and left without a forwarding address.

Motivation is not coming back.

This is the book for what you do instead.

Here, effort is not emotional. Discipline is not punishment. And identity is built through what  
you keep doing, not what you feel inspired to post about. At some point, you'll stop asking  
whether you're motivated and start asking whether you're willing. This is where the 'but I  
will' lives. Not shouted. Not announced.

Just said once.

And honoured.

So was the music.

A companion album, one song per chapter, written from inside the same argument as the  
chapter it accompanies. Not a soundtrack. Not a hype reel. The same work in a different  
register, by the same person, because some things that are true in prose are also true in three  
minutes and forty seconds with a guitar underneath them.

Find "*The But I Will Era*" on Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube, and wherever you listen. Each  
chapter end note names the song for that chapter. You'll know when you get there.

## Chapter 1: The Flat Feeling

Monday is just a Tuesday with better PR.

You've started something.

Which already puts you further along than you think.

And now the feeling that started it is gone.

Not because you failed.

Not because you chose the wrong thing.

Because that's what feelings do.

They show up for the beginning, because beginnings are exciting, and then they go, because week three is not.

This is the part nobody posts about.

No content exists when you open the document in the morning; there's nothing but the document.

No content for the gym session that feels identical to last week's and the week before that, and somehow also worse.

No viral moment for the person who sits down and does the work, again, with no feeling about it, because they said they would.

That person.

That's who this book is for.

The flat feeling means something, just not what you think it means.

You probably expected to feel different by now.

More motivated.

More like the kind of person who follows through without reminders.

Instead, you feel mostly the same, just slightly more aware that the decision you made yesterday has not released you from further responsibility.

It's still there.

Like the document you opened last week and named FINAL.

Like the gym membership you used twice and now feel emotionally obligated to acknowledge.

Like the habit that was meant to just slot in and has instead become very present in your life.

This is usually where people get uncomfortable.

Not because the work is hard.

But because it's ongoing.

Here is what the flat feeling looks like from the inside.

Not the concept of it.

The 9 pm on a Tuesday version of it, after work and dinner and dishes and whatever else the day took from you that you didn't budget for.

You sit down.

Your eyes are already sore.

Your brain has been running since before the first coffee, and it is now running on what's left after everyone else took their share.

The screen is there, the document open, and what you said you would do is still waiting.

And you have almost nothing left to bring to it.

This is the moment most productivity content skips entirely.

Because it is not photogenic.

There is no version of this moment that looks good in a caption.

There is no lighting that flatters it, no framing that makes it inspiring, no filter that turns it into content worth sharing.

It is just you.

Tired.

At the end of a day that asked too much.

Sitting in front of work that still needs doing.

And the flat brain, which is not dramatic and does not throw tantrums, says quietly: you're tired. Do it tomorrow. What's the point anyway? Nobody's going to notice if you skip tonight.

The flat brain is not your enemy.

It's just your nervous system running a cost-benefit analysis on your behalf.

The conclusion it keeps reaching, reasonably, is that rest is available and you should take it.

The problem is that the flat brain cannot see what you're building.

It can only see the cost of tonight.

It cannot see the accumulation.

It cannot see what twelve months of non-zero days produces.

It is working with the data available right now, at 9 pm, on a Tuesday, when the data is not flattering.

So, you must be the one who remembers what it can't see.

I knew at fifteen that I wanted to be a lawyer.

Not vaguely.

Not as a passing thought.

I knew.

The way you know certain things before you have the language for why you know them.

I also wanted to be a linguist and a pilot, because female pilots were rare and Top Gun had a lot to answer for.

But underneath all of it, Law was the destination.

University was never a conversation in my house.

Not because my mother didn't want it for me.

Because nobody had ever had that conversation with her either.

She was seventeen when she had me, raising us solo, doing the best she could with what she had.

She sent us to a private school, and I still don't know how she afforded it.

But the roadmap to university, the one that tells you how the system works, how people like us get there, that map didn't exist in our house.

So, I believed what made sense with the information I had: university was for rich people.

And I was not a rich person.

The thing I wanted felt beyond my reach.

I was wrong about that.

But I didn't know I was wrong yet.

What I did know, even then, was how to apply anyway.

At fifteen, I won a full scholarship to Japan.

Flights, accommodation, everything.

A year living and studying in a country I had never been to, in the language I was still learning, funded entirely because I put my hand up before I was certain it would work.

Nobody in my house had done anything like that before.

I didn't know it was possible until someone told me to try.

That pattern, apply before you're sure, move before the path is clear, find the other door when the obvious one is closed, that was already there at fifteen.

I just didn't have a name for it yet.

So, I went to Japan.

Came back.

Found out the Air Force had Linguists.

Joined up.

Served for nearly ten years full-time and five more in the active reserve.

Fifteen years in uniform, doing work I was good at, building a life that looked nothing like the one the fifteen-year-old had imagined.

And the whole time, quietly, underneath the career and the uniform and everything the years asked of me, the destination remained there.

Law.

Still waiting.

Still the thing I had always known.

It got there eventually.

Not because the timing was perfect or the path was clean.

Because the knowing held.

Through every detour life produced and every flat night when the flat brain said not tonight.

I'm not telling you this to be impressive.

I am telling you because it is a signpost, not a trophy.

A flag in the ground that points in one direction and says: look how long determination can hold.

Look what it will wait through.

Look what it will find its way to, eventually, through every reroute and consequence and detour that was never part of the plan.

I did not always choose the path.

But I chose what to do with it.

Every single time.

And that choice is available to you.

Right now.

On this flat Tuesday.

Whatever you are carrying, and the choices from your history that you are still living with.

The flat feeling is not evidence that the destination is wrong or that you have forfeited your right to reach it.

You haven't forfeited anything.

You just need to keep going.

The thing you are trying to do is built the same way mine was.

Not in the dramatic moments.

In the flat ones.

In the 9 pm sessions, with sore eyes and a depleted tank.

Every time the flat brain says "not tonight," and you open the document anyway.

Every time the path reroutes, and you adjust and keep moving.

Every time the destination feels far away, and you take one step toward it regardless.

That is how the bone-deep knowing gets built.

Not given.

Built.

This is *The But I Will Era*.

Not the era where all things seem possible.

The era where you do it anyway.

This is where people don't quit.

They drift.

They skip a day.

Then another.

Then they say things like, "I'll come back to it when things quiet down."

I just need a break.

I'll restart properly next week.

Which all sound sensible.

Responsible, even.

They are also how people accidentally undo momentum.

Not dramatically.

Quietly.

You don't stop because you failed.

You stop because you don't know what to do when motivation disappears.

Because nobody told you that motivation was always going to disappear, and the question was never whether it would leave, but what you had underneath it when it did.

That's what this book is about.

Not the feeling.

What's underneath it.

The quieter thing.

The thing that doesn't make noise because it doesn't need to make noise.

The thing that shows up on the flat days because you decided once, and it's still standing.

That thing has a name.

We'll get to it.

The flat feeling is not evidence that something is wrong.

It's evidence that you've arrived somewhere most people leave.

Week three is exactly where this gets built.

You're here anyway.

Go.

*<sup>1</sup> Professor Hardwicke notes that the decision to begin reading this book constitutes initiation. Post-initiation drift can begin as early as page four. He has chosen to mark this transparently. He trusts this information will not be used to stop reading. He continues reading.*

*End note: Pull up a chair. Close your eyes. Your chapter chat is waiting. The flat feeling means you've arrived.*

*And there's a song for this chapter, too. "The Steady Hum." For the days after the feeling left, and you showed up anyway. Follow the link or find it on the "But I Will Era" Album on Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube, and wherever you listen.*

## Chapter 2: The One Question

This morning started beautifully.

Offensively beautiful.

Sun through the drapes.

Birds are doing their whole thing.

The kind of morning that makes you feel, briefly and dangerously, like a person who has their life together.

You lie there for a moment, which was your first mistake.

Because of the morning, sensing your optimism, decided to have a word.

The hot water was gone.

Not lukewarm.

Not disappointing.

Gone.

Cold in the way that feels subjective.

The phone you plugged in was at 4%.

The charger had done absolutely nothing all night, possibly on principle.

One shoe.

Just the one.

Willow had relocated its partner to a location beyond the scope of reasonable investigation.

Willow is a golden retriever.

Nine months old.

She found the shoe interesting.

She moved it.

Already thinking about something else.

You are not Willow.

You looked under the bed.

Behind the couch.

Briefly considered that China was not outside the domain of possibility.

Left anyway, found the other shoe near the front door, where it had apparently been the entire time, which somehow made it worse.

Traffic.

Coffee that never came.

A meeting that started without you from a stationary position on a road that had retired from its core function.

You arrived.

Late.

Cold.

Undercaffeinated.

One shoe was located only after a small breakdown and a thorough interrogation of a dog who showed no awareness that there was anything to account for.

But you remembered pants.

Which, on a morning like this, is everything.

A bad start bleeds into the rest of the day.

The cold shower, the dead phone and Willow's logistical contribution become the emotional weather of the entire day.

By midday, you are not just behind.

You are, somehow, categorically behind.

The kind of 'behind' that calls into question your fundamental suitability for things.

And that is exactly when the Committee convenes.

This Committee was named by my friend Kate and me.

Not in a writing session.

Not as a metaphor.

In the trenches.

Kate held the line with me during the years our sons were on the frontline.

She knows what that kind of waiting costs because she paid it alongside me.

The long nights.

The phone that may or may not ring.

The specific, brutal arithmetic of a check-in that is late.

We named the voices because naming them was the only tool available.

You cannot argue with fear at 2 am when the phone hasn't rung.

You can name it.

You can look at it and say, "I see you. I know what you are. You are not the truth."

That's what the Committee gave us.

Just enough distance to ask: Is this about the thing?

On the nights when the check-ins were late, sometimes the answer was yes.

And we sat with that.

We waited.

When the check-ins came, we breathed.

When they didn't, the Committee went into overdrive.

Every scenario is playing simultaneously.

Brutal and unremitting and completely uninterested in being reasonable.

On a Tuesday morning with a dead phone and a missing shoe, the answer is no.

Knowing the difference is the whole skill.

The Committee doesn't need a formal introduction.

You already know them.

Whinging Wendy arrives first.

Always first.

Wendy keeps receipts.

The cold shower.

The dead phone.

Willow and the shoe situation.

Compiling since 6 am, delighted with the volume of material.

No catastrophising.

Just the evidence, presented, left to speak for itself.

Spiral Shirley slides in second, already mid-thought.

Shirley is the dot-connector.

A stolen shoe becomes, in four logical steps, a fundamental question about your capacity for follow-through.

No raised voice.

Just reasonable questions that burrow in before you've noticed they've arrived.

Lee arrives next, concerned.

A PhD from WebMD, unaccredited, self-awarded, extremely confident.

The cold shower, combined with inadequate caffeine intake and elevated stress levels, presents, in his clinical opinion, a clear contraindication to anything ambitious today.

Possibly tomorrow.

Drama Dave doesn't sit down.

Standing at the head of the table with the energy of a man who has been waiting his entire life for a morning exactly like this one.

Prepared remarks.

Extensive.

Silent Susan says nothing.

The sigh does everything.

This is usually where people quietly defer to the Committee's assessment.

Not today.

Because someone else walks in.

Her name is Stevie.

Red hair.

No clipboard.

Zero patience for the current proceedings.

No knock.

Straight in, looks at the Committee, looks at you, pulls up a chair.

Not at the Committee's table.

Next to you.

'So,' she says. 'Bad morning.'

You tell her.

The hot water.

The phone.

Willow.

The traffic.

The coffee that never came.

A nod.

No hurry to reassure.

'That's a lot. I'm not going to tell you it wasn't.'

A pause.

'Can I ask you something?'

You wait.

'The thing you said you'd do today. Does any of what happened this morning have anything to do with it?'

That's the question.

Not a framework.

Not a three-step process.

Just the question.

You sit with it.

Willow stole a shoe.

The traffic was terrible.

There was no coffee.

None of it has anything to do with the thing.

You're doing the separation.

Not Stevie.

You.

Watching you do it, she doesn't help.

Already knows you don't need her to.

The Committee stirs.

Wendy begins to present her receipts.

'Wendy.' Stevie's voice is mild. 'Are any of those about the thing?'

Wendy looks at her receipts, looks at the thing, looks back at her receipts.

Real.

Nobody is disputing them.

Just not about this.

The folder closes.

'Shirley. Same question.'

Shirley's dots do not, upon inspection, connect to the thing.

They connect to the morning.

The morning is not the thing.

The notebook closes.

Lee opens his mouth.

'Lee. Clinical opinion. Is today's morning medically relevant to the thing?'

Lee gave this question meticulous consideration.

To his credit, he is honest.

'Not directly,' he says, 'no.'

Dave has prepared remarks.

'Dave. Short version.'

The short version is not available.

The prepared remarks require context.

They get set down.

Susan sighs.

'Yes, Susan. I know.'

Stevie turns back to you.

'What's the smallest version of the thing today?'

You think about it.

Not the full version from Sunday night's plan.

The smallest version.

The one that proves to your nervous system that you showed up.

You know what it is.

'Five minutes,' she says. 'Enough to keep the door open. That's all we need from today.'

She stands. Looks at the Committee one more time.

They have nothing to add.

Some days, you ask the question carefully.

On other days, you just tell them to sit down and move anyway.

Either way works.

The bad Tuesday takes seconds. The brutal days take longer.

But the question holds.

The Committee didn't get quieter because the morning got better.

The morning is still bad, the shoe is still missing, and the coffee still hasn't come.

Willow is still completely unrepentant.

The Committee got quieter because you asked the right question.

Is this about the thing?

Most of the time, even when everything is loud and constant, the answer is still no.

The thing still needs doing. And that, my dear, is all on you.

You may not know Linda by name. But you know the kid.

Small person. Completely calm. Already decided.

Not remotely interested in the reasonable case being made against him.

He looked at her with the patience of someone who had nothing left to prove. Listen. Linda.

That's the energy you just found your way to.

You did the separation yourself.

You looked at the receipts, asked whether they were about the thing, and knew the answer before Stevie confirmed it.

The Committee called.

You didn't have to answer.

You separated the morning from the thing.

You asked the question.

You already know what it is.

I don't know how.

But I will.

<sup>1</sup> Professor Hardwicke notes that the golden retriever's behaviour, as described, represents a clinically significant contrast with the Committee's operating model. He has begun preliminary notes on what he is calling Golden Retriever Epistemology. He is aware that this may be career-limiting research. He has no further comment.

**End note:** Pull up a chair. Close your eyes. Your chapter chat is waiting. The Committee called. You didn't have to answer. But you will.

And there's a song for this chapter, too. **"Signal In the Static."** Because the noise is loud, and the decision underneath it is quiet, and the decision wins. Follow the link or find it on the "But I Will Era" Album on Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube, and wherever you listen.

