

The Backstory: Scenes and Stories from my Unscripted Life

Corey Maher

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An irreverent memoir, The Backstory is about navigating midlife with one's humor intact.

Revisiting formative moments from his acting career with humor and humility, Corey Maher's memoir *The Backstory* is about a midlife reckoning.

A catastrophic knee injury compelled Maher to accept a period of stillness. Writing from his wheelchair during his yearlong rehabilitation from bilateral patella tendon rupture, Maher borrows the acting concept of "backstory" to frame his self-examination. Each chapter covers pivotal moments from his Midwestern childhood through his middle age.

The book revisits family dynamics, career struggles, health crises, and personal failures in a nonlinear manner, moving between past experiences and the period of recovery. Physical rebuilding serves as metaphor for psychological reconstruction. Through it all, Maher seeks to understand who he is at fifty, rather than prescribing wisdom for others.

The book at times examines Maher's life at a remove, mimicking the way actors study their characters. While some chapters engage deeply with this backstory framework, though, others abandon it for straightforward reminiscence, resulting in uneven momentum. Further, the transitions between memories and the present are sometimes abrupt.

Still, the prose is active and unvarnished, as when rehabilitation exercises are described with visceral precision: Blood flow restriction cuffs deprive muscles of oxygen, atrophied quadriceps twitch uncontrollably, knees click like popcorn machines from accumulated scar tissue. These concrete details are grounding. Profanities also appear for emphasis and humor, though on occasion, the book's wisecracks undercut its earnest moments, suggesting deflection.

Still, the narration is appealing and vulnerable, with Maher positioning himself as an ordinary person who accumulated interesting stories. He acknowledges that his struggles are "champagne problems" and focuses on catharsis and reflectiveness over forced drama: "I feel like I've cleaned out the attic, so to speak, and let go of a lot of unresolved feelings and deep seeded regrets." Still, the book's introspective passages meander at times, and their rejection of self-help frameworks is sometimes jarring in its force.

The introduction's playful engagement with audience skepticism demonstrates metacognitive awareness, essentially prequalifying the audience by imagining someone's internal monologue about whether to continue reading. This technique either hooks attention immediately or is an opportunity to self-select out. And the concluding theatrical metaphor of intermission before the second act circles back to this framing device, expressing optimism about Maher's uncertain future.

The Backstory is a self-aware memoir about a period of self-reflection and personal reckoning inspired by a physical trauma.

JOHN M. MURRAY (April 20, 2026)

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