

Boxes Chapter One

Forward

Boxes-The Trappings of Society and Relationships is packed with action and suspense to propel you along as it immerses you in life's vexing challenges. It's an uplifting story of self-discovery and redemption in a society seemingly gone wrong.

The protagonist Tim Adams feels hopelessly boxed in by life. The shallowness, hypocrisy, and injustice of American society breaks his spirit. Ongoing bouts with marital strife and corporate corruption intensify his helplessness and anger. As pressure becomes unbearable, Tim plans a secret escape, and runs away in search of a more peaceful existence.

Tim's sudden departure is the catalyst for a series of events that reveal the profound impact of society on the choices we make and the relationships we treasure. Through the characters' search for comfort and fulfillment, I examine difficult issues and affirm universal truths.

Boxes came to full fruition over three decades. Reflecting passing years and yearnings, the novel matured to its ripest poignancy. Its message is more vital now than when its first words appeared in black & white on my Macintosh SE. Technology has changed exponentially. The human condition has not.

Whether you approach *Boxes* as a suspense story or slowly probe its layers of meaning, I hope you will be memorably entertained and enriched.

Wishing you peace and fulfillment.

Thomas DeSanto

I invite you to use the discussion guides in the "Unpack *Boxes*" epilogue of this book. Or download and share them at desantoboxes.com.

Choose from seven discussion guides to spur deep and lively conversation:

- Social Issues
- Relationships
- Self-realization
- Marriage
- Racism
- Spirituality
- Literary Analysis

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Tim Adams twitched with anticipation as his computer alarm struck noon. Lunchtime. Within seconds he tapped his keyboard and raced his cursor across the screen. Work saved. Documents closed. Working at Courtland Chemical Industries was as toxic as the deadly substances he wrote about.

Taking a deep breath, Tim rolled his head across his shoulders. Cervical vertebrae crackled with relief. He rolled off his chair, and quickly dipped to the depths of his workstation. Tim grabbed the 1950s corrugated-metal lunchbox he resurrected from e-Bay. Then he raced through the gray sea of cubicles.

In the bustling elevator lobby, Tim pivoted toward the stairwell door for a quick exit. But a dreaded obstacle stepped into his path. Kendrick Masterman, self-professed public relations ace, cornered him again.

“Mr. Adams, how’s it going this fine day?” said Masterman in a contrived anchorman voice. Tim shuddered as Masterman gave him a crushing handshake and vigorously pumped his arm.

Kendrick Masterman and Tim Adams were as different as could be.

Masterman sported a quarterback physique and movie-star looks. Golden hair curled over his ears, and sapphire eyes flanked a finely sculpted nose. When Masterman entered a room, heads turned. If not, Masterman became bioluminescent, lighting up like a firefly to attract attention.

Tim was average in height, weight, and practically every other respect. Short, poker-straight hair matched dark brown eyes set among garden-variety features. In any room, Tim blended into the wallpaper of humanity. He avoided the limelight and tended toward the dark side.

“Off to a meeting?” said Masterman.

“No, I’m out to lunch.”

“You’ve been out to lunch for years.”

“Very funny.”

“Almost as funny as your lunchbox.” Masterman hunched and pantomimed carrying a lunchbox. “Ralphie boy, I’m headin’ down the sewer.”

“I get it. Ed Norton in *The Honeymooners*. What’s your point?”

“You left the sewer. And made a real stink.”

“Not this again. I left the PR department months ago.”

The elevator doors opened. Masterman ushered Tim over the threshold. A herd of administrative assistants packed in. Masterman continued. “I still don’t get it. Why transfer to technical writing?”

“Machiavellian madness.” It was a convenient euphemism.

“Face it. When King catapulted Courtland to the top, you were too timid to run with the big dogs.”

“Timid” was far from the truth. Masterman had no idea.

The taunting continued. “Little Timid Adams bailed out of PR because he didn’t have the balls to take Courtland into the new millennium.”

Rage boiled up, but Tim held his tongue. Instead, his hand flinched as he thrust an imaginary dagger deep into Masterman’s ribcage. The bully deserved it. Within days after the transfer, Masterman replaced him as King’s personal publicist. He had coveted the position for years but could not wrestle it away. In the end, Masterman got what he wanted, but only by forfeit. Most likely, bullying took away the sting.

The elevator car touched down. Administrative assistants stampeded out. Masterman followed. Tim was close behind. Their rapid, clipped steps reflected the angst of their now-silent conversation. As they stepped out into the sun, Tim’s tongue broke loose.

“You’re the wimp here, Masterman. Still kowtowing to King. Right or wrong, you and the whole damn company cater to his every whim.”

“King is a brilliant CEO who generates media attention...”

“No, WE made King a hometown hero for building Courtland Tower. And WE made him famous for his business acumen and art collecting.”

“So what. That’s our job.”

“Yeah. We put out all this almighty-and-perfect King bullshit, so people are blind to what a corrupt, belligerent, psycho King really is.”

“And that’s how it works. But you’re nothing more than a pathetic Pollyanna. Your problem is that King’s appetite for world domination didn’t square with your save-the-world attitude. When are you going to realize that life is never going to be the way you want it to be?” With that, Masterman abruptly turned and took to the street.

Tim yelled back, “Life is NEVER the way ANYONE wants it to be.”

Masterman retreated into the shadows and reflections of Market Street’s office buildings. Courtland Tower, wrapped in 33 stories of green glass, cast a verdant glow. It was Emerald City where King ruled as the all-powerful Wizard of Oz.

Courtland was one of the few remaining chemical companies headquartered in Philadelphia. Most others, swallowed up by acquisition, moved away. In contrast, King built an empire through strategic purchase of smaller international competitors, and then secured his legacy with a gleaming office tower.

For five years, King commanded Tim to fulfill every task in the tower’s realization: planning the details, selling it to the board of directors, marketing it to the community, and squeezing every ounce of publicity out of its construction and opening.

As King jetted all over the world acquiring companies, he amassed a priceless collection of rare antiquities. To guard his treasures, King built a hidden vault into the executive suite of Courtland Tower, without it ever appearing on public blueprints.

Tim came to know every detail of the building, inside and out. Much like he came to know Richard King. But the King Tim knew was not the one revered by the business and cultural elite of Philadelphia.

King was more like the Wicked Witch of the West than the Great Oz. And Masterman was one of his flying monkeys.

Chewing the bitter cud of corporate strife churned up music in Tim’s head. It was a condition known as earworms, melodymania, or repetunitis. And it was triggered by stress.

In Tim’s case, the melodies came with improvised lyrics that transformed songs into the soundtrack for his life. Oddly enough, they were always sung in his own imperfect voice. It was as if his inner voice was set free by music. It sang “Live for Today” by the Grass Roots.

When I think of all the bullshit in the corporate grind. And how we’re in a hurry to complicate our mind. By chasing after money and dreams that can’t come true. I’m glad that I am different, got better things to do. I say screw this dismal future, I’m starting something new.

One, two, three, four. Sha-la-la-la-la-la, Planning my way. Sha-la-la-la-la-la, Running away. Busting out of being boxed in. Hey, hey, hey.

Tim Adams' wife sat at the empty bar at Dante's Italia, just as she did every Tuesday afternoon. Being Angelica Christina Dante, the owner's daughter, bestowed both privileges and responsibilities. Her glass of 1995 Dominus was on the house, but work was on the agenda.

Angelica leaned over a grandiose, leather reservation book and reached into a box of fancy Florentine-bordered note cards. Transcribing the name of the next party, Angelica glided her calligraphy pen in a graceful, flowing script. Her long, narrow nose tightened and flared with each syllable. And her pouty red lips parted in a satisfied smile as she finished.

Waiting for the ink to dry, Angelica slowly sipped her wine and stroked her long black hair. Then she neatly creased the card in half to form a table tent to welcome the patron to dinner that night. It was one of the personal touches that made her father's restaurant so successful.