

# Dreaming

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**0:00** **S**he had sat me down on a warm, flat rock in our clearing. I don't remember how long ago it was, but I can still feel the afternoon's emanating up into my crossed legs to be circulated throughout my body.

"I want you to just focus on the even flow of your breath. Feel it filling your chest, and try to pinpoint the exact moment when you pivot between inhaling and exhaling. Let that moment fill your mind."

This wasn't the first time we'd tried this, but it always ended the same way. How could she expect me to look inward when there's so much going on around me? It's all the stuff out there that really interested me, that truly held my attention.

The excited chirping of birds coming home to rest after hours spent riding invisible currents of air beyond the cliff's edge, the rustle of the trees jostling each other for the last rays of light as the sun sluggishly drags itself below the horizon, the...

"I know you're peeking" she guessed (correctly), although 'guess' may be the wrong term in light of my track record. "What are you trying to find out there, anyway?"

I was annoyed that this all seemed so clear, so simple to her. I still couldn't understand what one would hope to achieve through meditation that might warrant all this stillness.

"Something tangible? Something beautiful?" I retorted, "And what are you trying to find?"

"The same, I suppose." Silence.

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**0:58** Sighing, she turned to me and opened her eyes, their distinct blue fading to grey as the light chased the sun beyond the edge of the earth. "You know, one day you'll find yourself wanting more. There's only so much that you can take from out there before you're forced to look back at yourself. And you will have to find a way to do that when the time comes. Maybe this just isn't the best way for *you*. We both know you've never really been one to stick to a single thing for very long."

I didn't understand. I was offended, I think, though I wasn't certain of the reason why. I knew what I wanted. I wanted to keep moving.

I wanted to see the world.  
I wanted to be with her.  
I wanted to be happy.

“I want to be happy.” It was easy enough to say, but deep down I could feel that she was right in some way. There was something else, I just couldn’t find it anywhere. Outside or inside.

“I know. But maybe we should just get back to the basics for now? Take it one step at a time.”

“Okay,” I lifted my head to meet her eyes, “one step at a time... tell me what I need to do.”

“Just breathe in.”

I breathed in.

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**||** It’s just like the old Greek philosophers would say, “from breath, everything follows.”

Now, standing alone at our precipice, this new breath lifts away a heavy armour I didn’t know I was carrying, allowing whatever it was that had been pressing against my chest, stealing my breath, to flow through me. This leaves me feeling a new kind of vulnerable, but I think I may be able to live with that. I think I might even want to. Admittedly, metaphorical significance aside, a precipice like this is probably not the safest place to undergo a potentially debilitating emotional epiphany. Although I think she would approve of it, the poetry of the moment.

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**1:28** There was something else though, something nagging at the edge of my mind, not a new thing. It is a feeling she used to find in me, something that emanated from her in all that she did – all that she was. But now with all this new energy flowing through me – her kind of energy – I think I’m beginning to grasp the significance of this feeling. It was her passion, or maybe presence is a better word. She put herself into everything, and it seems like I am getting some of it back. But what am I to do with it?

I had always admired that about her, almost to the point of jealousy. How could she so effortlessly give herself to everything she did? While she was breathing life into everything that surrounded her, I always felt spread thin, what little passion I held for each new pursuit waning at the first sign of resistance. Even then, I often felt like a passenger to her endeavours, allowing her passion and vitality to direct my energy wherever she lead. And anyway, what would I even want to give myself over to that completely?

But it wasn’t just that, she seemed fearless! Hers was a shameless passion, she wasn’t afraid to lose herself to what she did. She was vulnerable, but that was the source of her strength. How else could you give away such big pieces of yourself – without ever expecting anything in return?

Until this moment, I had never considered allowing myself the kind of vulnerability, the open-ness, that this true passion calls for. Sure, there are things I enjoy, but I had always cut myself down before I ever got to a point where I’d start to put pieces of my own self into them.

So where was I in this world? There is nothing of me in anything, anyone. I may as well be a feather in the wind, a wren flitting mindlessly from flower to brush. But even birds carry seeds to far off places. So who am I to observe but not contribute?

*There's only so much that you can take from out there before you're forced to look back at yourself.*

I wonder if this is what she was hoping I would find.

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**2:05** Back at the cabin, there's an old upright piano in the far corner of the living room. I hadn't even noticed it when I arrived last night, but now it is arresting my attention as I mindlessly heap spoonfuls of Milo into a mug of scalding hot milk. The piano we had in my childhood home looked just the same, a faded brown with yellowing keys, although this one doesn't appear to have a name on the front – though it may have been worn down with age. I remember having some lessons for a few years but it was always too serious for me. I'm fairly certain I only stuck to it as long as I did because she would come in to listen as I practiced my scales and arpeggios, sometimes even perch by my side and attempt to play a melody to match whichever chords I happened to be dutifully plodding through. She would always tell me how lucky I was to be getting lessons, marvelling at each chord and scale, telling me I was a natural.

But I never really felt like a natural.

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**2:47** Unable to resist any longer, I lower myself onto the stool. The upholstery is wretched and torn, unsurprisingly uncomfortable. There is a visible layer of dust on the keys. It appears to have been played recently, but only sparingly – the fingerprint marks only occur over a small range – as though the last person to play this piano was also a little lost.

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**3:04** Another memory – sixteen years old, piano recital, blank stares and shaky hands. Mum told me some types of nervousness mean you are deeply invested in the outcomes of your performance. Dad nodded along solemnly. This did not feel like one of those times.

I could just make them out beyond the unflattering glare of the stage lights. Expectant. That was not my performance, not my stage, not my song.

I refused to even look sideways at a piano since then, so utter was my ensuing rebellion. It never belonged to me – this talent, this natural talent. I can't recall these hands ever playing a note that was just for me.

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I try for a sip of Milo – too hot – when the thought occurs to me. Maybe this piano stool was my precipice. Maybe I needed to jump.

**3:48**

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