

## Awakenings

Dawn stealthily approached. It was one of those days where the misty clouds hang oppressively low, shrouding the obscure sanctuary from sight.

David trudged solemnly along the narrow path. The monotony of the autumn leaves piled on top of each other caused his shoulders to droop.

The dreariness of routine overwhelmed his stream of consciousness as he neared towards the familiar cage. Hues of red and green, blue and white protruded through the narrow vista between the bars, an invitation to come inside and look.

David took a few quick breaths. His head was throbbing with pain. With his eyes forced open and his forehead etched with wrinkles from years of the same worries and frustrations, he tried to work through the pain as he always did. Pausing for a second, he reluctantly transfixed his focus on the task at hand.

Digging furiously into the bag of feed, the familiar feel of grains rubbed against his hand and seeped through his fingers. Every attempt seemed futile, the longer he reached inside, the less he could draw out and the searing of red-hot lava rising in his chest became more and more pronounced.

The incessant chirps became no more as he managed to grasp the last handful from bag. An array of chains sealed the cage from the external world and the silence of the sanctuary was perturbed by the horrendous rattle of David's keys, each rattle adding fury and tension.

Extending his hand outwards was a menial task. However, today, this daily offering seemed peculiar to the residents of the cage. It was like a familiar intruder had broken into their world. Lapsing back and forth, moving his hand in and out did nothing to stop them from aggregating in a remote corner, fluttering their spectacular wings with alarm. Their eyes became ripe with fear, their dusty plumage giving off the sensation of loss and confusion.

"Did I do something wrong?" he thought.

Walking further in, stepping amongst the cocktail of dirt and droppings, he surrendered himself to the bars. Blades of light penetrated the abyss while he tilted his head and fixated his fervent gaze towards the distance. Such daily toil had forged within him an elastic perception of time with the past, present and future intermingling in his mind. He closed his eyes and allowed himself to drift into the depths of the unconscious...

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The violin was crafted from mahogany oak; its mellow and sonorous tune filled the sanctuary of David's room with bliss. Lush plants were aligned at the windowsills and sunflowers bowed to the sun as it conducted its daily revolution about the Earth, illuminating David's haven. The

occasional moments of silence where punctuated by a harmony of notes, flowing off the bow with ease.

“David!” shouted his father...“Come check these out”.

“Pretty, ay?” he insisted. “They could sell for a few bucks”.

David hesitated to protest. “Perhaps after...Dad?” he replied “I’ve got to perfect my rehearsal for fete”.

“Come and I’ll show you how to feed them!” he fired back, almost oblivious to his son’s response.

“I’ll show you the tricks of my trade”

An uncanny silence consumed the room as the violin found its way back into its case. Unbeknownst to David, this would be his very last rehearsal...

The coming of age brought with it the knowledge of the family enterprise. Like a one-way street, David’s musical prowess seemed like a roadblock to his father’s entrepreneurial vision.

He felt caged. He wanted to escape but ever so slowly his passion eroded, wilted and withered, succumbing to the persuasion of his father the salesman.

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In his imagination, standing in his room again, he peered outside the window toward the edge of a foreign land. The turquoise water reflecting the patterns and stories of the clouds - shades of blue met with uncountable tones of green from the trees. The sand was soft between his toes as he steadily breathed in the salty air of the sea that was carried by the light breeze.

As he enjoyed this moment of solace, a mighty crash of the ocean shattered the stillness of his thoughts and then slowed down to greet him at the shore. He collected shells and held them against his ears – each shell harboured a different type of beach, and a different world of emotions. He closed his eyes and felt the adrenaline from the wind again as it surpassed the boundaries of his imagination.

He wondered how he let himself lose sight of the world by neglecting the most important feature of his happiness – the sounds of nature herself.

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The merciless shower of solar rays warmed his already half-baked face. Staring blankly out through the aperture of the cage seemed like an overwhelming task. Pausing one last time to catch his breath, an invisible force compelled him to look toward the other direction.

They had left. What remained were the half-eaten remnants of seed and grain. There were no chirps, no colourful hues and no looking back. The primrose path to their escape was laced with the fresh odour of droppings, having relieved themselves of their burdens.

The ambient sense of fear seemed to evaporate as he ran toward the open cage door. Almost inviting him, it embraced his frustration.

David had always wondered why the birds stayed in the same place when in fact they could fly *anywhere*.

Then he asked *himself* the same question...

