

## The Fluttering

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There is one memory that stands out among the millions of memories of her life. A simple memory of a spring day that she can still feel down in her bones. This memory she clings to as a reminder of what is possible...experiencing joy. It takes little effort to recall setting off on foot down the hill from her apartment towards the river, a tiny studio apartment shared with an undiagnosed bipolar. They were best friends and inseparable. With the help of a staple gun and yards of many-colored fabric, they had divided their cranny into three rooms, thus creating the illusion of personal space. But even with this partitioning of rooms, their lives continued to collide and overlap. I suppose this could be attributed to her own meekness and willingness to be pushed around by the gentlest breeze, allowing the other to bowl her over with a pendulum swing between fun and daring and angry and toxic. However, on this day she breathed an introvert's sigh of relief to be companionless and free from the ongoing dance with mania.

With a backpack full of snacks for her soon to be encroaching "munchies" and a journal scribbled full with her most tormented teenage thoughts, she became one with the loveliest of spring days. She lifted her face to the sun, pressed play on her Walkman, filling her ears with Naughty by Nature's O.P.P., and strutted down the street. Thanks to the 90's love for a baby doll style dress, her body was draped in one that was billowy and of the softest cotton. It fluttered pleasingly around her knees atop a pair of now off-white, molded to her feet Converse sneakers. Her trek eventually ending at a patch of lush green grass upon which to sprawl. She affectionately received the generosity of the sun just as a lizard would relish a good sun bath upon a warmed rock. After a long, cold Washington winter, how wonderful it was to be able to toss aside her bundling layers and feel the warming of her limbs. This, together with a cool breeze from the Spokane river tickling her skin, she felt delicious. In those moments, the rushing of the river soothed all malaise. Released from her was the tension brought on at home, the itching to be high, and the general confusion of being 19 years old. Gratitude oozed from her.

At that tender age, she held the assumption that one day life would become easier, that her dreams were within reach, and that her gifts would eventually be appreciated. There was something deep down inside of her that felt she was special somehow, interesting even. It is youth's kindness that allowed her the opportunity to spend a bit of time walking in this ideology before life humbled her with ferocity.

The days of lounging carelessly by a river are long gone now. They turned to vapor the moment she was holding a brand-new life in her arms, just hoping to be able to keep this tiny human alive. Meanwhile, the endorphins in her brain misfired all over the place and her teeth felt fuzzy from a lack of basic hygiene. Sleep deprivation, postpartum depression, and severe anxiety had robbed her of any and all self-grandiosity.

This squirming, grunting little life was one of those dreams she had dreamed in the grass that day, a seed of hope carried in her heart even at 19 years old. "I will be an excellent mother someday," she thought, "I love children and they love me. My heart is of gold, and I am a warm, compassionate human." She harbored no doubts about this under that far away sunny sky. She now found bitter humor in her naivety and lack of imagination. In such innocence, it was impossible to have imagined the burning rage

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she would be capable of, muddled under the cloud of depression. These days her prayers were murky at best, muttered out of desperation. Yet she found strength to wake up at every whimper and provide her breast. She continued to artfully clean between the chubby little folds and to challenge her blurry eyesight in attempts at clipping tiny, paper-thin nails without accidentally snipping skin. All sense of self felt as if it had been drained from her body. She strained to see her faint shadow at the end of a long, narrow hallway, moving farther and farther from view. Slowly the remnants were peeling and falling away as she involuntarily shed her former skin. Feelings of resentment plagued her thoughts. No one had warned her how painful this metamorphosis would be. Searching her way blindly through this maze called motherhood, passing what often felt like seventy-two-hour days, it seemed that no one was willing to provide the empathy she longed for. Feeling delicious is not a thing within the fog made up of these accomplished dreams and answered prayers that surround her now.

These days her body is draped in B.O., dirty sweatpants, and tears that arrive so faithfully each mid-day as her strength wanes, exposing her fragility. She often wishes to be someone who gives up. But she isn't. She is a get up every morning and handle your business kind of girl. Familiar with "normal", she hides behind her prettiest normal face when she musters the courage to step out the front door for necessary tasks, such as filling her gas tank or acquiring sustenance. If she can ignore her pounding heart and tightness in her chest, there will be pride in getting dressed for a short walk around the block. The smallest achievement while feeling so alien in her own skin is enough to spark pathetic fireworks of celebration within her. "I drove farther than a ten-mile radius from my home without a panic attack. Yay me!", she silently cheers. All the while she wonders who this person is.

A glimpse in the mirror reveals her newness. Where there was once yoga toned arms, her muscles have now been earned carrying a Velcro baby and accomplishing amazing feats one handedly. Yet it is what lies behind the reflection that is truly unrecognizable. Looking back at her, there used to be an adventuresome girl; one who, from the back of a camel, had sizzled under the beating sun of the Sahara Desert, who had enjoyed a cool mist upon her face in the mountains of Nicaragua, and who had boldly walked the dunes of Maspalomas alone. She had possessed an overflow of courage and knew what it was to soak up the richness of the world around her to the fullness of her senses. That world of new experiences seems to turn without her. Silver linings have become fraught with fear and self-pity, frustration and disillusionment. Her world now feels like clinging by her fingertips at the edge of a cliff, insanity lurking in the darkness below. Anymore, she lives with intentions of limiting stimuli, desires only sleep, and hopes to survive the late afternoon hours without crumbling completely.

And she does.

"Don't forget to look up at the sky," a wise mom once shared. Heeding this advice, she steals miniscule moments for herself. When she knows for certain that her baby girl is safe from harm, and only then will she peel her eyes away, she glances upward.

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Logically, she knows that the sky remains unchanged, but still, it challenges her faculties. Her brain wonders, "Is it still blue? Do I know this color?" The same sky she has admired for four decades magnifies the faulty connections inside her head. Her eyes burn with tears as her insignificance envelops her. Even so, her heart strives to feel, reaches toward a constant that is a blue sky.

She remembers the comfort of that beautiful emerald green dress she donned on a warm spring day, the tiny white stars covering the soft fabric, the fluttering....

Such simple pleasures that ignited gratitude within her; and within her is the gratitude that can reunite her life with joy. Even though she is not sure where she fits into the reality of blue skies and downy white clouds, she will continue the climb out of the foreignness inside her mind.

Just this morning, while clinging to her life blood first cup of coffee and thumbing through a magazine in hopes of summoning a steady train of thought, a burst of flowering magenta covering a page catches her eye. Impulsively, she rips out the page in a flurry of excitement. After rummaging through an old box in the garage, she finds the perfect weathered white frame that will accentuate the vivid pink, a complete contrast to the muted colors that depression has brought to her life. She chokes back salty tears and feels a fluttering as she finds the perfect home for her new picture. She reads the simple quote nestled in the center of the bright flowers; a gift seemingly meant just for her.

*'Always we begin again. - St. Benedict'*