

OPEN SKY

By Danielle Brame Whiting

MARK

Mark stands in an open field looking up at the night sky. He takes a deep cleansing breath before lowering his head to survey his more immediate surroundings.

I'm letting go.

For the longest time there's been this knot in my gut. Twisting tighter with each passing day. Bent with shame, I've been kowtowing to what life was throwing at me without resistance. Clamps, pinching my shoulders and neck. Pressing down. Relentless. Exhausting. A pain, behind my eyes, shooting through to the back of my skull. Bullets fired without notice, indiscriminately and lethal.

Breathe.

I'm letting go.

Breathe.

Of the life I thought I was working towards. The home and car and family. The perfect job. I thought I was meant to build a savings account and mow my lawn. I was meant to chase debt and make a difference to the world. I was meant to procreate and spend my spare time teaching the children to ride bikes, climb trees, build campfires, and become happy and resilient individuals who will go on to reinforce the status quo and keep the world in its current stasis.

Breathe.

I'm letting go of all of it and I'm moving forward.

I don't need to follow the well-trodden path that a group of old white guys in three piece suits ordered to be paved along our streets in order to support their comfortable lives. I don't need to admonish myself when I fail to match my feet to the footprints that have walked before me. I don't need to laugh at your jokes to have a sense of humour or hold my tongue when I see an injustice. I don't even need to shower every day.

Breathe.

I use to shower everyday. I would wake up at 5.30am and go for a 5k run. I would eat a breakfast high in fibre and slow releasing energy. I would drink a coffee and catch up on the news headlines before getting ready and jumping on the bus to head into work. I would shake hands and laugh in all the right places at the clients jokes. I would attend every professional development opportunity that my job offered because that would show them I was serious about my career and advance me along. And that's success right? Ambition and advancement. You want to be successful, yes? You want to achieve?

The thing is, I was so busy focusing on taking all the steps necessary to achieve, that I missed all the moments that surrounded it.

Here the actor might explore a physical demonstration of climbing the ladder of achievement.

I climbed the first step getting to work early, leaving late, improving my numbers. I missed too many first dates to count. I took my lunch at my desk to make sure I stayed on top of my work and was "available" for my clients and colleagues. I missed enjoying my lunch down at the park on the sunny days. I pushed through and kept working when I was sick. I missed the opportunity to recuperate correctly. I took on more work that I could reasonably juggle. I missed family events and nights out with friends. I almost missed the increasing anxiety that was taking over my thoughts, movements and choices. I almost missed the dull, thumping headache that began at the base of my skull and crept, slowly, until it had engulfed my whole head. I spent five years missing so many beautiful moments of sunlight and friendship and memory making and adventure, and at the end of it I was an overblown ball of anxiety with an empty filling.

I was empty.

Sure, I'd advanced. I was successful. I had a business card that included the word manager on it. I also had no significant personal relationship with any of my colleagues, no hobbies, no social life, and a growing list of ailments.

So I stopped.

One day I was on my way to a client meeting and I saw a group of guys having lunch. Amongst them was a guy who had started at the company the same day as I had. I hadn't seen him for at least three years. He was a great guy and he was laughing just the way we did when we first met five years ago. Just the way I hadn't laughed since. You know that free and comfortable laugh that denotes real joy? In that moment, I realised what I had missed. A moment later he spotted me and called me over. It was great just sitting there, in the sun, and catching up with an old friend. Laughing. Listening to these other guys all talking about life and slowly coming to a realisation that my idea of success had been somewhat ill-informed. I wasn't successful. I was just busy. Busy doing something I didn't even enjoy. Busy trying to impress people I either didn't know or didn't like. Busy filling every minute with everything except thought and heart and imagination. I might have been successful in the eyes of my company, but I had actually failed the one person who mattered in the equation. Myself.

So I stopped. I let go. And now I am moving forward.

Breathe.

Breathe in and out, as my shoulders rest toward the ground and my neck finds its mobility again. Breathe in and out, as my midriff shakes off its bonds and slips into a peaceful rest. Breathe in and out, as my legs and feet are no longer filled with weighted baggage, and each step almost floats above the ground as I move. Breathe in and out, as the dirty, thick smoke finally clears from my mind and, for the first time in a long time, my eyes can recognise colours and light.

And now, and now, I'm looking across a vast open field, blanketed in a loving and nurturing sky, and my path is unclear.

Smile.

I think I'll wander for a while and see what that brings me. I won't plan or even think about it, because I'm letting go

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