

2/7/14

## ESCAPE

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Sometimes, I feel the effects of being trapped where I am. The signs have become familiar: a growing tightness in my chest; a pallid, blanketing fog creeping into my mind; a nagging, cloying urge to run - not ~~to~~ anything, but away from this slow, crushing feeling - yet my feet stay still.

The grimy, off-white cinderblock walls that surround me, bearing quotes and messages - most of which have been written by me in hopes of self-inspiration - are cool to the touch. But it's not a refreshing coolness. It's damp, sticky, putrid almost. As my chest grows tighter, those walls close in until I can feel their breath on my cheeks - stale and oppressive.

My eyes dart around wildly, searching for a way out, as my gasps grow more shallow, more rapid, until it becomes too much so and the walls push me down and I push back and my arms grow weak and I feel heavy and the taste of copper blossoms over my tongue and light starts to fade and my teeth are too clenched and the world becomes muted and the walls push down more until...

... I close my eyes. One, two, three. Two, two, three. Inhale.

Exhale. In... And my shoulders begin to relax. My jaw unclenches, ever so slightly. The knot in my chest breathes along with me. I dare to feel free, just a bit. The walls around me begin to fade, like a memory.

They're replaced by stalks of towering bamboo, so deep a green that they seem almost a dark blue as they reach to the sun, obscuring the sky. I reach out to one of them, gently. Its grain is smooth and cool, but this coolness feels alive. The corners of my mouth turn up in such a slight smile as I take in my surroundings like a fresh, deep drink of water.

I'm in a forest on the other side of the world, outside of a town that's the only place I've ever truly felt at home. A comforting breeze dances around me, caressing my whole body as it carries with it the life-giving

Scent of living earth and late autumn foliage. The hairs on my arms stand up, electrified by such a jarring tranquillity. Small brown sparrows - Suzume, they're called here - swirl together in the space just above my head, then disappear into the endless sea of swaying bamboo. A tear creeps into my eye - the beauty is overwhelming.

I walk, barefoot, through a small path woven through the bamboo shoots. The moss underneath my feet is a lush, verdant pillow, so soft and welcoming that it takes real effort to bring each footstep up off of it. The breeze changes course; now it whispers to me from the west, carrying with it on each loving gust the crisp, earthy smoke from an autumn fire. Farmers are burning their rice fields as the sign of another successful season, and this aroma mingles with the delicately sweet nectar of some nearby flower, invigorating my soul to its core.

A faint rumble makes itself known as I pad <sup>through</sup> this ethereal haven of life I'd come to know so well. It grows louder with my anticipation, until I make my way into a clearing, damp with mist from a crystalline waterfall cascading into a deep blue pool edged with moss-laden rocks. The rumble is deafeningly delicate, and bright orange and yellow koi swim to the surface to greet me as I dip my toes. It should be impossible for somewhere so perfect - so serenely beautiful to exist, yet here I stand enraptured in the middle of it, nearly brought to my knees in awe by the sensual overload it has enveloped me in.

As a light rain begins to fall, I wonder if I'll ever be able to return to this place again, though I know at least that I'll always be able to visit in this way. I notice the knot in my chest is gone as the lush greenery begins to fade. The drone of the waterfall gives way to the the voices of other inmates outside my cell door, and the cool, gentle autumn breeze assumes the form of stale, artificial air being pumped in

From a barred metal vent. I take a slow look around me, at the four white walls that trap me in. At all the metal and the concrete and the bars and the brown and beige paint. But now, I smile. I smile because I know how to escape this place.