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Epiphany in E Minor

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"One day, you might wake up and realize you've become someone. Realize you've become someone you didn't think you would become. And you might wonder at all the idiosyncrasies you've developed, where they came from and what they mean. You might wonder how you got here, to this place in your life, to be this person that you are; and you might start to make connections between who you were and what happened to her, and who you have become. You might remember your childhood in faint, ambiguous terms."

Cover Page Footnote
You've given up your whole life to become the person you are right now. Was it worth it?
- Richard Bach

One day, you might wake up and realize you've become someone. Realize you've become someone you didn't think you would become. And you might wonder at all the idiosyncrasies you've developed, where they came from and what they mean. You might wonder how you got here, to this place in your life, to be this person that you are; and you might start to make connections between who you were and what happened to her, and who you have become. You might remember your childhood in faint, ambiguous terms.

You might remember that where you grew up, you could play a whole game of tennis in the street before a single car came to intrude. That you could look across the road and see the house your dad grew up in and walk up the big, sloping hill to the site of his one room schoolhouse, right next to what used to be sacred burial grounds and is now a white man's cemetery. You might recall how you measured distance by fields and made landmarks of barns and large piles of rock that never moved. These might tell you about your desire for permanency and your resistance to change.

You might think about how time was told by the height of the sun, and a converted Greyhound Bus worked as a camper for the motley crew you called your kin. About how there was no key for the door and no need for one. And how everyone knew everyone else. Or maybe about how they planted trees for their children each time one was born and knew they'd be there to see them grow. You might recall how you watched your grandfather's barn erode, till one night a storm ripped off its roof and threw its thick frame into the deserted road. You might realize how these have formed both your vulnerabilities and your strengths.

You might recall how a neighbor passing by might carry your fragile frame to the door if you crawled into the road while your mom was inside on the telephone. How they would never have thought to threaten to call the police. How you could sit in the field for hours on end, wondering if your Irish ancestors stole this land directly from the natives, who are also your ancestors, or on the sly in some twisted treaty and feeling the air grow tighter with each new speck of understanding. You could wonder what this land once held and if the bones of the past are really buried as deep as they seem to be.
This might be indicative of your current duality and lack of connection with any one culture, any one thought.

You might remember that finding an arrowhead was a common occurrence and making necklaces out of a people's weapons seemed okay. That buffalo often danced across the sky in painted clouds. That they dug up that land on top of the hill, searching for clues of the Seneca village, which stood there long ago. How they named it Ganogarro until they realized they were using the wrong dialect and they quickly and quietly changed it to Ganondagon. How you lived down the hill from people you were related to half your life and never knew it. This might indicate your reluctance to identify yourself as American Indian, not because you would be embarrassed, but because you have been raised white.

You might remember that the alleys downtown contained wrought iron benches and were planted with espaliered flowers. That the brick laid a hundred years before peeked through the balding pavement at the corner of Maple Avenue and Main Street. You might remember how the ancient buildings, trailed with ivy, still clung to the ink that branded them a century ago and how much like people they really were. You might remember that fields and creek beds, dry or flowing, were the most common hangouts for the youth. You might wonder if this constructed your penchant for water and open space and your hatred of asphalt.

And you might remember the mantras about skeletons in the closet and not hanging your dirty laundry out in public. About how you worried that your mother's hands could be wrung only so many times before the skin began to wear away and the bones began to show. You might remember how things were never really as safe as they seemed. How your friends were much more likely to kill themselves than be killed, but both happened. You might remember your realization that small towns can steal your soul away without any hint of it being in danger. And you might wonder if this resulted in your refusal to accept appearances, rather than truth.

This might remind you how surprised you were to realize that many people outside New York think the whole state is a city and how surprised they are that you don't have an accent, don't own a gun, and don't know what they think you should know; about dark seedy alleys and muggings in broad daylight and taxis and how many blocks it takes to get somewhere. How they are surprised when you tell them you spent half your childhood in massive fields, catching bullfrogs, and the other half wondering why they didn't plant a tree for you. And you might wonder if this is what drove you to the city.

You might remember how you lived, for a while, on Court Street in Syracuse.
Where the only sounds you heard more than gunfire was traffic and the only time you heard a child laugh was when you tickled the one in your arms. Where people left their children with you for an afternoon and they ended up staying for six months. Or the one bedroom apartment on Butternut with your ex-fiancé, his mother, her boyfriend and his crack head uncle, packed in like sardines, realizing privacy was a luxury you had taken for granted. Where you could never figure out whether it was worse to hear that baby crying from that dark window every day as you walked to work or worse when it cried no more. This might explain why you never look strangers in the eye and you don't laugh as loudly as you used to.

You might remember the homeless shelter in downtown Rochester, right across from a nightclub called Heaven, in which you would stand upon the roof at night and watch the normal people pay their dues to dance the night away. Where you had to wander the streets every day looking for a job and receive blank stares when you filled the address line in with 90 Liberty Pole Way. Or the economical housing you lived in on Carter Street in North Carolina, also known as Crack Central, where you got so used to the noise that you couldn't fall asleep for weeks when you moved back home to that small town in New York and the sound of a cigarette burning was enough to put you on edge. Or that beautiful, Victorian apartment in Rochester in a questionable neighborhood with obnoxious downstairs neighbors who beat their dogs, threw ethnic slurs up the heating vents, and swore constantly, and neurotic roommates who were once your friends and are no longer. This might tell you why you always lock the door and why you never completely trust anyone anymore.

Or how you lived at your sister's house in North Carolina where the air conditioning saved your life when you went two weeks past your due date in the middle of a heat wave, and in which time you became addicted to cable television. In your sister's husband's office, on a futon in the corner, waiting tables by day and babysitting nights, wondering about life and trying to learn from somebody else's mistakes and not create your own. And at your sister's house in Farmington, in a room that had particleboard for walls, where your daughter lay in a cradle handed down through all the grandchildren and you dreamed of painting her world in sun-warmed colors. This might account for your love of your family even with their many quirks and quandaries.

You might think of how you now live in a little flat above a barbershop in East Rochester with your newly acquired husband and your precocious daughter, where the windows rattle every time a train goes by and the heating bill climbs higher every day. You might realize how much you long to own a house, something you would have never dreamed of a couple years ago because you were always going to get out of here.
might wake up one day and realize you've become too interwoven into your surroundings and too attached to your family and too invested in the life you've made to trade it all in.

You might realize you are not going to move to Colorado or New Mexico or Japan as soon as you save up enough money. That you are not going to join the Peace Corps or a traveling actors group or the circus. That you are going to stay here and continue to go to all the family functions, be there for all the new babies and the birthdays and the funerals. That you are going to be here to take your father to the doctor and watch your sister's kids and get together for any reason you can create and go sledding in a large motley pile of scarves and mittens and laughter.

You might wake up one day, play connect the dots with your life, find out how you came to be here, wonder at the complexity of it all, unearth your unknown reactions, grieve for other paths not taken and realize you've become someone you didn't think you'd become. You might do all these things, all the while thinking how depressing it is to be a broke college student with a five-year-old daughter at the age of 26, and wind up realizing that you are happy.

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