

First, please don't be alarmed by the amount of edits. I approached this as if I were editing for publication, so I have included both big-picture suggestions and copy edits.

This is a lovely, quiet story that nonetheless hints at great change for the narrator, a kind of waking up. In fact, that's where I think the story could be most strengthened. I wanted to know more about the narrator's motivation. Was there something on this morning in particular that finally/suddenly made him or her get out of bed and get outside? Was it just an accumulation of years of hibernating? A small insight into that would deepen the story.

The other part of the story to pay attention to is the turning point, when the MP3 player stops working. That moment could become an even clearer dividing line between unawareness/awareness. You might consider how the narrator reacts *before* the player stops working, when he/she sees the bicyclists, the family, and the old couple. Maybe he/she could pay less attention to them or not ask as many questions about them. Emphasizing the inward focus even more during the first half of the walk would heighten the contrast with the second half.

You have a great eye for detail and imagery, which really carries the story. Thanks for the opportunity to provide feedback, and if you have any questions, don't hesitate to email me at ackalman@gmail.com

Regards,

Audrey

The Walk

(Word count=1974)

My original plan for that January morning was to do what I'd been doing every weekend since winter officially began and that was to: take my coffee mug up into my room, shimmy back under the covers and hibernate, that~~which to me meant~~is sleep, eat, pee, and repeat until daylight warmed the air.

I ~~was~~have always been impressed by those who somehow ~~fi~~ound the motivation and energy to accomplish tasks during the winter. I contemplated ~~on~~this while standing barefoot on my cold kitchen tiles waiting for my coffee to brew. Usually, it took a personal pep talk in order for me to even stretch a toe out from underneath my blankets. Sometimes it took a growling stomach ~~and or,~~ in the worst case scenarios, an urgent call from "nature."²

~~My original plan for that January morning was to do what I'd been doing every weekend since winter officially began and that was to take my coffee mug up into my room, shimmy back under the covers and hibernate, that is sleep, eat, pee, and repeat until daylight warmed the air.~~

~~T~~While~~he~~ aroma of my brewing coffee ~~brewed and its aroma~~ filled the air,³ I hugged my thick terrycloth robe close around my body and ~~walked over to~~retrieved a mug from the cupboard ~~to get a mug~~. Then for some reason, I turned towards~~s~~ my kitchen window, pulled up the blinds, and stood ~~there~~ holding my still-empty empty mug.

To the west, the quiet sky was a beautiful shade of indigo blue. It was clear, still, and lightly dusted with bright twinkling stars. ~~M~~Then, instinctively my eyes wandered to wards the east, where the stars had begun to retreat as the glow of the rising sun slowly stole the~~r~~ night away. I looked across the sky, from left to right, east to west, indigo to orange, and caught sight of a lone seagull gliding through the air, warming its wings in the earliest morning light.

Comment [AK1]: I'd like to know what's different about this morning? Why did the narrator not stick to the usual plan on this particular day?

Comment [AK2]: Maybe look for a more descriptive adjective.

Comment [AK3]: Nice image!

I sat down at ~~my-the~~ kitchen table with my coffee ~~and-observed-that-e.~~ ~~With every sip~~ every time I took the mug away from my lips, the scene beyond ~~my-the~~ sliding glass door changed a little bit. ~~T~~With every sip, the sun rose a bit higher, pushed away more stars, and ~~returned~~ brought the dark silhouetted trees ~~back-closer~~ to their natural shade of green. More ~~and-more~~ birds joined the seagull to dance in the sunlight. ~~I-thought-about-how,~~ Unlike me, the birds had not stayed in their warm nests. ~~I~~ Instead, they were like those people I admired who greeted each day with boldness, no matter the weather. ~~It-was-then-that~~ I felt as though I was missing out on something ~~and-that-something-was~~ beyond the comfort of my cozy bed.

Comment [AK4]: When it's all first person, you don't need to add in these kind of verbs ("I thought," "I observed"). It puts more distance between the writing and the reader and the reader will understand that these are the narrator's observations and thoughts.

Comment [AK5]: This might be a good place to go into a bit more of the narrator's motivation. Why is he/she feeling this now?

I finished my coffee and quickly changed out of ~~my~~ pajamas and into ~~my~~ workout clothes. I dug my walking shoes out from ~~beyond~~ the ~~darkness-depths~~ of my closet and grabbed my coat, gloves, and sunglasses. ~~I fished an old MP3 player from the basket by the front door.~~ I placed ~~the~~ ear-buds in my ears, and selected one of the playlists ~~on-an-old-MP3-player~~. I opened the front door and squinted ~~instantly-in-response-to-the-sunlight,~~ . ~~The sun seemed to scream~~ it was as though the sun was screaming at me, ordering me to retreat ~~back~~ inside. It was tempting, ~~and-I-considering~~ my original plan, but I still believed ~~that~~ there was something to discover outside. So I locked ~~my-the~~ front door and took a few steps off the front porch. The icy air sent a shiver ~~of-chills-throughout-my-body-me,~~ but, inspired by the birds, I pressed on.

Comment [AK6]: I think introducing the idea here that the MP3 player is old makes a better setup for what eventually happens.

~~One foot in front of the other-~~ The sun ~~gently~~ warmed my body ~~and-as~~ I walked down the street, onto the main road, and past the neighborhood shopping center. I bobbed along under the clear blue sky, listening to my favorite music, ~~utterly~~ unperturbed by the occasional icy breeze. ~~I walked until~~ In a few minutes, I reached a pathway that led to the gravel side of a county trail ~~that runs~~ running along either side of the creek ~~which-that~~ empties into the bay.

~~As far as I could tell~~ I was alone on the trail. ~~From time to time~~ Occasionally, I glanced at the variety of shrubbery ~~or and occasionally~~ adjusted my speed to avoid a small lizard or an indecisive squirrel, ~~but mostly I focused on the music. The music I had playing,~~ kept me going. ~~Whenever the song changed, T~~he fantasy in my head changed ~~whenever the song changed~~ ~~right along with it.~~ I went from dancing in a club, to singing karaoke, to driving along the coast, ~~and to embracing a lover.~~ -Sometimes, ~~a memory was triggered, and I thought of I would remember~~ when I first heard the song. ~~W~~was I ten? Or twelve? Or seventeen? Where was I living? What did my bedroom look like ~~back~~ then?

Comment [AK7]: Lizards don't usually come out early in the morning when it's cold.

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Comment [AK8]: Again, no need to set this off as thoughts—the reader will understand that the narrator is thinking it.

Comment [AK9]: I think if you want to really emphasize the contrast between being inwardly focused and outwardly focused, you might want to add a bit more to these interior, song-directed thoughts. As it is, the narrator seems to spend a fair amount of time looking at things and thinking about things on the trail even before the MP3 player stops working.

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At one point I saw a small group of professional-looking cyclists on the paved side of the trail, ~~they were~~ heading in the direction of the bay. I admired their dedication on such a frosty morning. I wondered how long they had been riding. ~~Did they head out before the sunrise?~~ Did they start in the hills? ~~Where were they going at was their destination?~~ Were they training for an event? ~~It didn't matter,~~ I couldn't ask because they were out of ~~my~~ sight almost as quickly as they had appeared.

Several minutes later, on that same side of the trail, I saw a young family: a mother, a father, a toddler, a stroller and a very hyper puppy. I wondered how ~~this~~ picture--perfect family ~~were was~~ able to leave the house so early and energetically in the cold. ~~Did they drag themselves~~ out of bed like me? Were they early risers like the birds? ~~Did the energetic puppy dictate the~~ early morning exercise? Had they seen the cyclists? I shook away my unanswerable questions and returned to my ~~own~~ music--driven fantasies.

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The next time I looked up I saw an elderly couple off in the distance on my side of the creek. They were meandering along with their little white curly haired dog. As the couple grew nearer ~~to me,~~ I could tell that they were holding hands, ~~and that T~~heir wholly mismatched

outerwear covered them so thoroughly that even when we were ~~but only~~ a few feet apart, I could barely make out the essentials of their faces. They were cute, and unlike the sponsored cyclists whose bright outfits matched from their shiny helmets down to their cycling shoes, or the family with their contemporary clothing, the old couple had the luxury of no longer caring what others thought of them. ~~Their clothes might once have been Fiddler on the Roof costumes.~~ They smiled at me as ~~our paths crossed all the while wearing clothes that may have once been Fiddler on the Roof costumes we passed.~~

Eventually, I reached the end of my route, a curve in the path that intersected with a city ~~roadstreet.~~ I turned ~~around~~ and ~~headed back~~ started for ~~home,~~ and ~~t.~~

~~That's when the MP3 player stopped working. I was at least twenty songs away from my home with nothing but the sound of my own inner voice to keep me company.~~

~~In a state of disbelief I stopped walking.~~ I pressed and repressed the on/off button ~~until~~ ~~until~~ eventually; even the battery display ~~stopped no longer~~ appeared ~~ing.~~ I don't know why I was surprised. ~~The~~ device hadn't been used or charged in months. I ~~had only~~ grabbed it ~~only~~ because I spotted it in the basket ~~near the front door at the last minute.~~ ~~Frustrated,~~ I nearly ~~broke~~ burst into tears. ~~I was at least twenty songs away from home with nothing but the sound of my own inner voice to keep me company. but~~

~~eventually realized that my luck had come and gone and~~ I had no ~~other~~ choice but ~~to~~ walk home in silence. I yanked out the ear-buds and shoved them and the dead device into my pocket. ~~and headed back home. Along the way, I considered that maybe I had yet to experience the thing that kept me from crawling back into my bed. And perhaps there was something more than people watching and animal avoiding to my wintry walk. It was then that I started. As I~~

Comment [AK10]: I broke this into two paragraphs because the next paragraph is pivotal to the story.

~~continued walking, I began~~ hearing the sounds I had missed while under ~~the~~ music's spell. But I didn't just hear them in the background ~~like as~~ I had with the music. Instead, I listened to them.

I listened to the ~~crunching sound~~ my sneakers made when they smashed into the gravel and the chatter and laughter of the family on the paved side; they too were on their way back home. I heard ~~their voices and~~ listened to them ~~as they talked~~ about going to a birthday party later in the day. I heard the father direct his child to observe a little squirrel that was circling a tree trunk. I listened to the child laugh excitedly as he watched the squirrel with his father. ~~In the~~ absence of my ~~musical~~ earbuds, I listened to the ~~icy breeze as it whispered~~ past my ears and to the lone biker who shouted ~~at me~~ from behind, "On your left!" just before his tires whizzed past ~~me~~.

In the distance beyond the trees and bushes that lined the path, I heard the constant hum of city noise. The rumbling ~~sound~~ of thousands of engines cutting through the wind echoed ~~continuously~~ from ~~all~~ around the city. Occasionally these sounds were overpowered by ~~that of~~ a train whistle, a police siren, a motorcycle, or an airplane flying overhead. Sometimes ~~there would be a brief cessation of all these~~ ~~these~~ chaotic city sounds ~~would cease briefly~~, a two-second pause of absolute silence ~~that filled in~~ momentarily with the sounds I realized I loved the most: nature's.

The sounds I longed for became the most difficult to hear. I wanted to listen to the gentle crash the crane's wings made as the bird took off from within the nearly dried-up creek. ~~I enjoyed how~~ ~~the~~ ~~occasional~~ mysterious ~~and occasional~~ cracks and chirps of nature sparked my ~~otherwise~~ dormant curiosity. ~~Was~~ was that a lizard? A small bird? A mouse? A squirrel? A dead leaf scraping against a rock as it settled into the earth? I loved the loud hissing and tapping sound the leaves made when a breeze woke them up and stirred them into a little frenzy.

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No longer in a hurry, I sat down on a bench ~~that facinged~~ the creek. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. I tried to separate out the many city smells that reached me: of my city; the reek of exhaust, the woody smell, the sweet flowery smell, the smell of thousands of breakfasts being cooked; and the salty smell of the creek. As I inhaled again a strong gust of fresh odorless wind traveled in from the bay; ~~through and across~~ the creek ~~and a~~. As it blew by, it washed away stole the city air ~~out of my lungs~~. ~~It was then that~~ I thought about the birds dancing outside my kitchen window; and how peaceful it must have been to greet the day soaring, arms-wings stretched wide in the fresh, clean morning air.

Comment [AK11]: Are these city smells?

Comment [AK12]: Is the wind from the bay really odorless?

As I approached ~~my~~ home, the smell of exhaust became more ~~evident and~~ overpowering. The sounds of nature were no longer audible; ~~and w~~. Without my music to ~~buffer it out~~ mask them, I was forced to remain up close and personal with the city sounds of the city. Instead of the constant blended hum of motors, I was able to separate one engine from another; and distinguish the change in pitches of each ~~made~~ as it ~~took off~~ accelerated or slowed to a stop. I could no longer make out the sound of my ~~own~~ shoes hitting the pavement, but I heard a man in an SUV place his order at a drive-through window. ~~I and~~ winced as a teenager yelled threats into her phone. I heard four tires rub along the sidewalk as the driver pulled his car into ~~the a~~ driveway. A television blared from inside one home; and the smell of pastries and bacon came through the window of another.

Comment [AK13]: This seemed out of place since the rest of the paragraph is all about sound.

Finally, ~~my foot slapped down on my own~~ I stepped onto my front porch; ~~and~~ I stood ~~there~~ for a moment; looking up at the bright sky. I no longer had the desire to crawl back into bed and hide from the cold. ~~as t~~ There was too much to do, see and experience. I resolved ~~F~~ from that day on, I woke up to wake early like the birds; ~~I and~~ reached extend out my arms ~~and to~~ embraced the potential of each new day.

My I jiggled my keys, jiggled and I unlocked my front door, I and turned the handle, and listened as

The door creaked a bit when I opened it. I stepped inside and tossed the dead MP3 player back into the basket.

-The end.

Comment [AK14]: This is just a suggestion, but I feel like the end of the story needs something more—a final image that relates to the theme of rediscovering the outside world. You could use the MP3 player or something else; something to indicate how the narrator has changed as a result of this experience.