I wake up at 4 am, because I’ve heard this is when Monks wake. It’s considered the Magic Hour. I think I’m beginning to see why. I’m immediately beginning my morning journal and pages. They help me reflect and stay focused on my goals. This takes an hour or so, but requires wiggle room to feed my cat, give her some attention (though she always asks more than I can spare) and sometimes evacuate my bowels. Next, I work on my novel. It doesn’t feel good when I’m doing it, often, but I still show up for it every day, because consistency and discipline is key. You can’t be relying on inspiration to get things done. At 6 AM I begin my morning exercise. My goal is to add 10-15 lbs of muscle weight, but on no specific timeline. However long it takes to do it right. I trust my trainer. After, around 7, if my cat doesn’t scream too much for attention, I do Pranayama and meditation. 7:30, I drink my protein smoothie, I prepare oatmeal on the stovetop, then hop in the shower. I only need five minutes to clean. I enjoy my oats with blueberries, and focus on the experience of eating as much as possible, even as my mind is already running to the next task. I remember to be proud of all I've accomplished in the first four hours of being awake. Sometimes, I forget the practice of gratitude. I prepare lunch to take to work. I must eat warm, cooked food for my digestion. At work, I will attend to some tasks, but often it’s as if my mind disappears as soon as I sit down at the desk. I think about the things I’d like to work on. Often, I can’t manage it when it’s so easy to stare at the internet. A six-hour shift passes, and I don’t feel satisfied by what I’ve accomplished. Beyond earning more money to survive, I don’t feel I’ve used my time well. Ideally after work, I will run any necessary shopping errands, then either read or write on the train home. Oftentimes, I drift off on that commute and do nothing. I’ve come to dread doing nothing. It feels like a waste of precious time. When I get home, I cook a nice dinner, I socialize with my roommates, make phone calls with friends, or try to get myself to do more work on my book. I try to go easy on myself when I don’t meet these goals, but accomplishing them feels like a matter of sanity or madness.

Around 8 pm, I make warm hemp milk with sweetener and herbal supplements to wind down. I read until I doze off, hopefully by 9, giving me 7 solid hours of sleep. It’s not 8 hours, but there’s simply too much to do. I have to write a best selling novel. I have to become a fitness guru. I have to achieve all my dreams, and these things take time, of course, but you have to work towards it every day. I’m alright with things taking time, but let’s not pretend we have all the time in the world. Our time is short, so we must make every bit of it count.

In my morning pages, I reflect and meditate on myself, and this life I’ve carefully constructed for myself. I work very hard to be painfully, brutally honest with myself, though not judgemental or unfair. I feel like I’m wearing a straight jacket because I’m afraid I’ll fly apart if it comes off.

My obsession with discipline and routine is a trauma response. It is a response to the fact that I feel the shadow of The End looming over me constantly. But it’s bigger than me. It’s a shadow that whispers: “If you fail, then the world falls with you. You’ve got the whole world in your hands.” What I’m doing is clearly not enough; it is selfish, but I also remind myself that me taking care of myself is also in service to the world. It needs as many sane people as it can manage. I hope this is true.

But is this sanity? Everything I do is to maintain a secure fortress within myself, to protect myself from the world, such that I wonder if I’m even in touch with the world. It seems to me sanity is a matter of how in touch one is with the world outside your head. If I’m not engaged with the world, then can anything I’m doing claim to truly be healthy?

I remind myself that sadness is the greatest mark of sanity, and not a problem to be fixed. Of course, unless we’re talking about chronic depression, which is a problem of brian chemistry.

I keep in mind that I can let all of this go, and I wonder if that would be “better.” I flirt with my old friends, Entropy and Chaos, who tell me change and growth are short sighted views on things that always return to zero, zilch, nada, bupkus. These days, I insist that they’re wrong, and truly, I feel good, and I feel growth, even amidst the constant stressful challenge I put to myself.

In my morning journals, I note all the invitations to bad old habits, the desire to let go. I’m thankful to myself, to show up for my potential. I recognize over and over again that my behavior is a healthy way to cope with the massive trauma of the world.

I cannot let myself drift. My routine keeps me grounded. My routine is a safe, focusing practice, for every time the shadows visit.

One day, I know the shadows will come and take me away, and I will be ready for it. Otherwise, what am I doing this all for?

Yes, I have a problem with letting go. What do you really think happens when you let go? People get romantic about letting go because they tell you it looks like freedom, surprises, excitement, adventure, a shot at love. They never talk about when it looks like despair, addiction, or schizophrenia. When it means being vulnerable to those who would take advantage, and do you harm. They don’t talk about when you get hurt, or you hurt yourself, or lose yourself entirely. There is no upshot on any of this.

Perhaps, though, I’ve met some people with what you might call “a loose grip.” Not a slippery one, just a grasp more agile. It’s not like I don’t crave all things fresh and new; it’s not like I don’t have faith that good things can happen outside my control.

There’s a person that comes into the store I work at who has this loose grip. For example, they’re homeless by choice. They would be absolutely competent, capable, and likeable enough to probably con their way into hedge fund management, but they choose to sleep on the subways.

One faithful day, I speak to them about my anxieties. They browse the items of my store and intone casually: “Nowhere to go, nothing to do, no one to be.” I ask if they’re an absurdist or an existentialist or a buddhist, and they shake their head.

“You’re afraid you’re running out of time.”

“I *am* running out of time. We’re all running out of time.”

“And you think there might be something you can *do* about that?”

Shyly, I respond, “Make the most of it, I thought. Leave nothing behind. Tell important stories that outlive me, that show I lived meaningfully and well.”

The customer never stopped browsing the store's trinkets all while he asked these strange questions, as if withholding a present he could only give once the day had arrived.

“What do you make of the fact you’ve only ever seen or heard of other people dying?”

What a silly question, I think, though it’s so obvious that I end up doubting myself as I respond: “I make of it that my own time is sure to come where my life ends.”

“And what if there were no ending?”

“To my life? I suppose it’d be a relief. But wait,” I protest, “In your hypothetical, am I simply immortal while the rest of the world keeps changing and rusting away? we’ve been over this with vampires and such, it's always lonely and meaningless.”

The patron shakes their head again and pushes open the door of the store with one of the most valuable items of the shop in their hand. I chase after them, and they are surprisingly fast. I have to decide quickly whether to keep up the chase or go back to the shop, which I can’t leave unattended in case of more thieves. The situation feels like a metaphor I’m living out, but I feel powerless as it plays itself out. I keep up the chase just long enough for it to appear futile, then double back to the store, only to find the display windows broken, a whole gang of thieves swiping every item on every shelf. They have guns, so I know I’m not expected to fight back. I call the police, then I call the owner. He is baffled, but initially kind to me. I go home and hold to my routine cup of milk before bed. Sleep is hard, so I spend hours rolling through the fear of being fired, a scenario I can’t stop living in my head. The next morning, in the middle of my meditation, I get a call from the owner of the store who explains gently that this mistake, a long with all the others, small though they might’ve been across time, and considering the store itself may be finished, he has to let me go. I am crushed. I thank him for being such a good boss to me these years.

I conclude I am incapable of my dreams. I renounce all ambition. I am ready to live for no particular reason, just to survive, resigned to being no better than the dog shit I pass every day.

I eat whatever I want. I play video games for days without sleeping. I enjoy the pleasures without reservations, and when I feel the inevitable consequences, I shamelessly seek the alleviation of discomfort, no matter how temporary. I no longer have anything to accomplish, so I accept my own decay. I don’t care to notice how quietly my life seems to be slipping by me. Let’s just get on with it. Since I no longer hold on to any control over myself, I go through cycles of insomnia and weeks where I don’t leave bed, even to piss or shit. I have bedsores, my muscles atrophy. I lose my appetite, and develop a fever from septic conditions.

I don’t know how it happened, but I haven’t seen my roommates since I can’t tell how long. I haven’t seen anyone else or left this room in time I can't recall. My dreams have reduced to the scope of this ashy, lavender room I lie in. The light doesn’t change anymore.

I am sorely disappointed to learn Death is not an ending. Oblivion would be preferable. Instead, I realize the underworld is everything the myths said it was: this cold, dark, uneventful place where spirits linger forever, too afraid to do anything particularly. The ultimate irony of a spirit unbounded by mortality or flesh, the very source of our dream of freedom--choosing to hide in a quiet and sleepy place, mimicking sleep because it’s afraid to do anything else. The dust of a quiet crypt floats from the detritus cast off by the sunshine world above. I yawn, because I am bored, and I want to sleep and rest, but of course, there is nothing to sleep and rest for. I exist, and I am bored of it, and this is how that looks forever.

I hear things happening just beyond the walls of this room. More sighs and yawns, a whimper or two, a sniffle, even a snide chuckle, a single jaded guffaw that then retreats back into the shadow of bitterness. All these things all seem to go around in a cycle.

What seems to be true at this point is that I will do this and be here forever, and it will have been my choice. I in fact never truly let go in the way people mean. My descent to the underworld marked the ultimate clenching, the ultimate heaviness of gravity dragging me down here, away from all light and life. I am a constipated shade, composed of a fear to release.

I accept fate. The sighing and whimpering, my own dance of spiritual lethargy, goes round and round in a cycle, but each time it has finished repeating itself, I become somehow more awake, and more agitated, and the sleepiness and ennui is giving way, ripening into madness, restlessness, fury. I start to clench my skeleton, still wreathed in sinewy flesh, stale blood churning within me once more. With a croak from my unused voice, I try to sing, to be heard by those voices in the walls.

My singing is unsteady, and disingenuous. I feel a desperation to change my circumstance, if I am responsible for this endless moment, what it looks like and how it feels, then I should be able to transform it, to make a better endless moment. I am singing poorly, trying to imitate my idea of a native american chant. It is disingenuous and foolish, and the voices in the walls are laughing at my foolishness, and I am laughing too, and a cauldron of desperation is churning within me because there must be some way for me to change this endlessness.

I am screeching, exercising every capacity of my body: bulging eyes, masterbating, fingering my asshole, gesticulating in every conceivable way, feeling a maelstrom of spirits, attitudes, and personas entering and exiting me like a marionette prostitute. I chase every good feeling and can’t sustain it.

Finally, Yoga finds me.

I somehow remember from one of my lifetimes attending classes in a hip Brooklyn studio, I remember the basic asanas. Breathing, the arms raise up high. Exhaling, the arms lower to the sides, eyes closed, I see nothing, and there is nothing to see. Air and prana move through me and guide me, and I have lost my anxiety for control. For now.

I move through Surya Namaskar A & B, and this, this I can do forever. Nowhere to go, nothing to do, nowhere to be.

I am a novice learning self-love. I am back at my true room, and it is night still, and a clock tells me it is 4 am on the 5 or 6th of January. Every day, the world has new frightening things to reveal. It always will. I am learning a skill. I wonder if mastery of that skill looks like truly embracing that there’s no such thing as mastery, and no way to complete what can’t be completed. I don’t know. But I like the idea of being a beginner who is learning.

I return to my routines. I am still struggling with self-love. I am still struggling with all the same problems. I still don’t know whether there are any problems. I am still learning. I am still.