

## **The Breathing Room**

Breathe in.

Hold.

Breathe out.

In.

Hold.

Out.

A gong sounded, somewhere seemingly far away, although she knew the manmade speaker was stashed in a bush four feet to her right. With the final reverberations filling the air around her, she loosed her last breath, opening her eyes to the canopy above.

She gathered up her mat, rolling out kinks from her neck, exchanging gentle smiles with her classmates as they packed up their belongings, ready for the day ahead. Morning breathwork was the highlight of their day. And, at \$275 a session, it really better be.

Yes, it was steep, but, she thought, looking up at the lush greenery, hearing the caws of birds, the chattering of a family of monkeys, well worth it if you had the money. The air in the dome was just so....fresh. Plus, it was a massive tax write off. She'd learned that charity was rarely something done out of the kindness of one's heart. Slowly, lazily, she fell in line, crossing the rope bridge suspended over a rushing waterfall and making her way to the locker rooms, where a cool eucalyptus towel and a steaming hot shower waited for her. These moments, under the spray, with water - real rainwater, not the desalinated blend from her home tap, were among the most peaceful of her day.

Shuffling in spa slippers, she dressed carefully, pulling her jumpsuit on, taking care to be sure her collar was straight, the company logo hung just so. She practiced her customer service smile in the mirror while rubbing in the expensive lotion set out for customers.

"Welcome to The Breathing Room, where the air you breathe turns into the cash you spend."

Slapping the last of her rose scented lotion onto her cheeks, she exited the locker room, nodding to her coworkers as she boarded the moving sidewalk and started the short commute to her shift. Today she was in the Himalayas. This was an entirely different crowd than the meditation center, and a drastically different price point. For \$850 an hour customers, mostly men, would summit Everest, pretending to risk life and limb over the false peak, and most importantly - breathing hard.

The breath, obviously, was what made this whole place run. What made the whole world run, actually. Carbon dioxide. The most precious gas on Earth.

Human beings, when backed against an impossible wall, can do truly amazing things at great speed. With the impossible wall of climate change bearing down on her great grandmother's generation, governments came together and dumped trillions of dollars into carbon sequestration, desperate to rectify the inaction of their predecessors. And it worked. Magnificently. By the time she was born, the climate had equalized, floods calmed, wildfires extinguished. Carbon was drawn down from the atmosphere, stored underground, in tanks in factories, until there was too much. An excess.

Emissions may have fallen, but capitalism had not, and a few clever entrepreneurs had a brilliant plan to repurpose the excess. CarbCoin. Companies with climate goals bought CarbCoin at astonishing scale, until the hexagonal coins, CO2 mixed with recovered waste metal, replaced paper currency. Why cut down trees when you can contribute to the circular economy?

Enough CO2 was sequestered. The world was in equilibrium. An unbelievable success. But the machine of capitalism kept chugging, always ravenous and never satisfied. Shareholder value must be created, at all costs. And so carbon farming began.

From her post in the control room, she could see the "hikers" approaching the faux-Khumbu Icefall.

"Increase the incline three degrees," her supervisor Jim's voice crackled in her ear piece. "Looks like the intake in Sector 4 is running lean. We need more panting."

Charity. In "donating" their time, money, and metabolic waste to the government minting facility, the elites received tax credits that far outweighed the cost of the session. And The Breathing Room, as the processor, kept 20% of the haul.

She spun the dial that made the glacier slightly steeper, watching a particularly heavy-set man fall to his knees. His sensors were going crazy, the controls in front of her showing his exhales were providing more than the scrubbers could handle.

"Would you look at that," Jim's own heavy breathing in her ear nauseating, "at this rate he'll mint a mortgage by the end of this session."

Several hours later, after their showers and massages, the executives filed out of the room, slapping each other on the back and making dinner plans for bluefin tuna down the street. Farmed bluefin was incredibly expensive - the tanks were enormous, and the false currents energy intensive. But their session, and The Breathing Room's partnership with the restaurant, paid for it all.

"Hey, thanks kid. Feels good to give back." A tall man flipped a CarbCoin at her, winking one ice blue eye as he dropped his towel to the floor on the way out, missing the clearly labeled hamper by several feet.

She looked at the CarbCoin in her hand, still smelling of eucalyptus and rose, and thought about her great-grandmother's early sketches, elaborate fans made to save the polar ice caps. Her breath caught, and she closed her eyes, not wanting to see the glitter of the fabricated snow in front of her as she shut off the lights. Shoved her thoughts deep down. This singular CarbCoin represented six months of student loan payments. Technically, her great-grandmother's work was functioning, albeit not as intended. The climate WAS saved. Polar bears populations were way up, so much that they were almost pests. She added the coin to her stack, tips from a week's worth of engagements with wealthy clients. Then, snatched it back, turning it over between her fingers, reconsidering. She'd worked hard that week.

And earned some takeout bluefin on her way home.