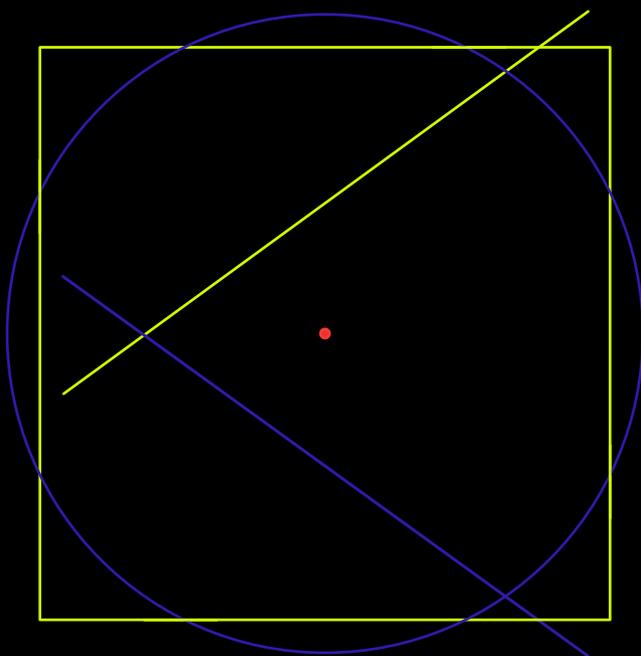


# LIVING STORIES

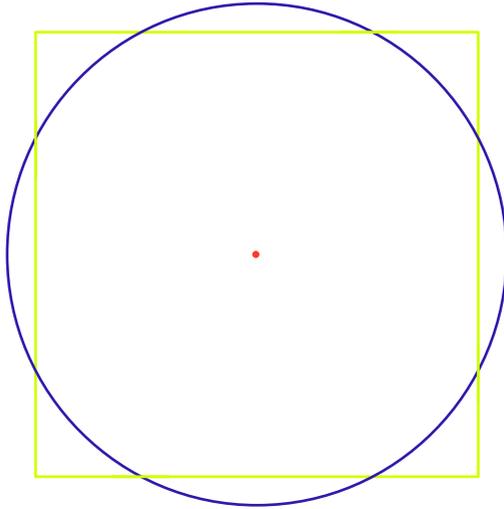
Begin



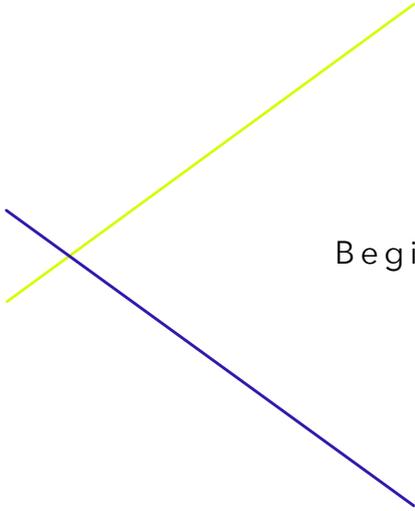
*a Listening Book*

Christopher Collings

LIVING



STORIES



Begin

Welcome to

# **L I V I N G   S T O R I E S**

*a listening book*

*where narrative and sound connect.*

The book will guide you through  
moments of reading and listening.

When a visual appears,  
pause and listen.

The music is available on Bandcamp:  
[www.christophercollings.bandcamp.com](http://www.christophercollings.bandcamp.com)

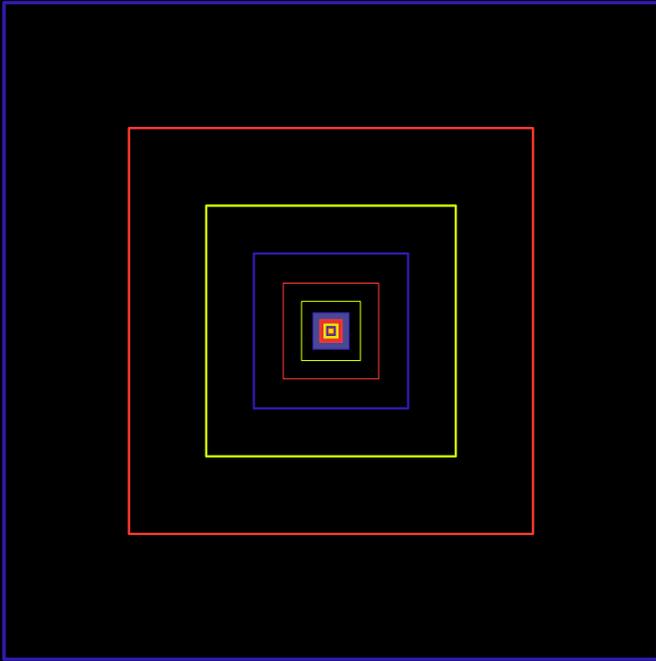
Album

**Living Stories: Begin**

For the fullest experience  
use headphones or speakers.

Enjoy the journey.

*Are you willing to enter?*



Enter

Our lives

Full of stories

The same stories

Repeating themselves

Over and over

Until we grow

Out of them

Moving  
Into a new chapter  
The decision is here  
Waiting for us  
Questioning  
When to start  
Now  
Is the right timing

Full of stories  
We are full of stories

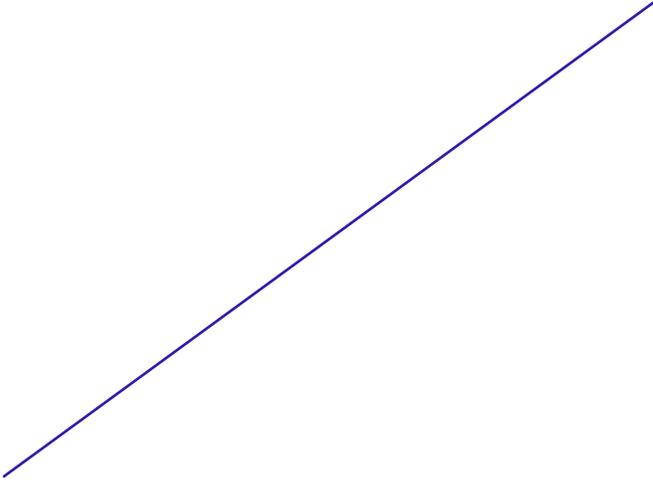
Telling stories  
Living stories  
Sharing stories  
What's your story

Story

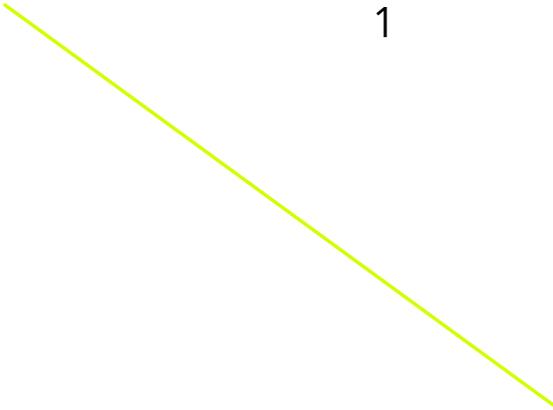
What is your dream

Who are you behind your mask

Start to shine



Episode  
1



## Episode 1

The red bus slows down to a halt. He stares out of the window at the dawning sky, lost in thought. His mind is too loud to leave room for the beauty outside. Tapping his thumb nervously on his leg, he doesn't even realise that the bus has stopped. Outside, the world feels calm. Inside, his mind is chaos. He snaps out of his day dream when she stands next to him.

**Cora** Sorry, is this seat still free?

**Hugo** [*hesitant*] Um. Yeah... sure.

He nods unwillingly, not thrilled about losing his extra space. As he clears the seat, his gaze is drawn to the blue circular symbol hanging from her neck above the black hoodie. For a brief moment he lingers on the symbol, but then quickly turns his focus back to the window, locking onto the lonely cloud drifting across the sky as his thoughts slip back into their familiar spiral. His belongings feel cramped under his legs, and his thumb taps faster and faster on his right knee. Silently, they sit side by side as the bus starts to move. After a while, she turns toward him.

**Cora** Hey, do you know what stop is coming next?

**Hugo** Um, no... sorry.  
I only know the stop I'm going for.

**Cora** Oh, okay.  
*[curious]* So... where are you going?

**Hugo** To the mountains. And you?

**Cora** I'm not really sure yet... just seeing where it goes.

No one says anything for a moment. She lowers her eyes, unlocks her phone and scrolls through old messages. Next to her, the restless passenger starts tapping his thumb again and turns back to the window, unfocused and distant, his gaze lost somewhere outside. The bus driver switches the radio channel, humming along to the music. Meanwhile, she keeps checking messages but doesn't reply, instead she glances through the bus looking for something that might hold her attention.

Almost everyone is absorbed in something – reading, listening, or staring out the window. Only one little child stands out, quietly drawing the sky with a moon surrounded by stars. She watches the child for a while, captivated by its quiet creativity, before turning back to him.

**Cora** So... how long are you travelling already?

**Hugo** I, uh... left this morning. What about you?

**Cora** I've been travelling for a while now.  
It's... kind of a lot, but it's nice. Clears your head, you know?

**Hugo** Yeah... I guess?

*[short pause]*

**Cora** What's your name?

**Hugo** Hugo. And yours?

**Cora** I'm Cora.

**Hugo** Nice name. Don't think I've met a Cora before.

An awkward silence settles between them. Hugo drifts back to staring at the sky. Cora reaches into her bag and pulls out a book. She opens it and reads the same sentence six times, then puts it down, deciding that she doesn't feel like reading. Instead, she grabs her phone. Hugo glances at the book, trying to make out the title. Cora, noticing his curiosity, holds the book up slightly, turning it toward him.

**Cora** You know it?

**Hugo** I think I've heard of it. But I haven't read it.

**Cora** The story is great. Can recommend it.

**Hugo** Cool. I'll check it out when I get back from the trip.

As he speaks, Hugo nods a couple of times, his gaze already slipping slowly back toward the window. She opens the book again, but the words blur before she reaches the end of the sentence. The bus driver takes a sharp curve which pulls Cora's thoughts back into the present.

**Cora** What's your plan actually, when you reach the mountains?

**Hugo** I... want to hike up to the peak.

**Cora** Which peak?

**Hugo** Um... I heard many stories about this one place.

Hugo glances out the window, his fingers nervously fidgeting with the strap of his backpack. He hesitates, like he's deciding if he should talk about it.

**Hugo** Uh, well... there's supposed to be a quiet spot up there with this amazing view. You can see forever... and for a moment, nothing else matters.

He hesitates, glancing at her, unsure if he's making sense. She waits for him to go on, but feels the need to fill the silence.

**Cora** That sounds... nice.

**Hugo** Yeah... people say the air is different up there. Like it clears your mind or something.

Bit by bit Hugo starts telling her more about the peak – stories that live inside of him, half rumours, half hope. Cora listens, nodding along, happy to have some company on the ride. The bus slows down, the doors open as a few passengers step inside. Hugo keeps talking, his voice gaining a little more confidence with each sentence. As she listens, Cora's gaze drifts to the yellow square printed on Hugo's white shirt.

She watches the way he gestures as he speaks, how he repeats certain phrases, how every story seems to repeat itself, over and over. His voice grows steadier, his thumb keeps tapping nervously against his leg, like a habit he doesn't even notice. As he speaks, he seems to step into the world he describes. He's not just telling stories – it seems like he's living inside of them.

**Cora** Wow, you really know a lot about that mountain.

**Hugo** Yeah... I've heard these stories since I was a kid. And, I don't know... ever since, it's kind of my dream to reach the top.

**Cora** I see. But... they are still just stories someone else told you, right?

**Hugo** I guess? But, I don't know... I just like them. They seem real to me, you know?

**Cora** Hm.

She looks out of the window, chewing on her lip for a moment. Trees rush by in blurred patterns, painting the window into abstract landscapes with strokes of green.

**Cora** I'm wondering... where are all these stories coming from? I mean... every story needs a beginning, right?

**Hugo** Yeah... I guess?

**Cora** So, when did you hear about the mountain for the first time?

**Hugo** Um, I don't know. It's a while ago.

**Cora** Isn't it weird how we believe stories without knowing where they came from?

**Hugo** Um...

**Cora** In this book I'm reading, it says stories don't just disappear, they stay with us – shaping who we become.

**Hugo** Okay but... what kind of stories are you talking about?

**Cora** Any story, really. But the book is mostly about the ones we believe about ourselves – who we are, who we think we should be, and all the little roles we keep playing without even noticing. And once I started thinking about it, it's kind of crazy how much I believe them, even when they don't make sense.

**Hugo** Um... I don't know, sounds confusing.

Hugo stares at the glass of the window, not really looking through it, but into it – wondering how he ended up in this conversation, and starts imagining how he might get out of it. His reflection shimmers on the surface and he shrugs when he sees his eyes staring back at him. For a split second, he doesn't recognise them, like they belong to someone else. His mouth opens slightly, as if waiting for something to happen – then closes again. He looks like he wants to say something, but the words don't come. Cora doesn't seem to notice his discomfort.

**Cora** Like, think about it. Stories are just... I don't know, things in our head. We just make them up, right?

**Hugo** Um, I think they are more than that.

**Cora** So, what are they?

**Hugo** Well... they're not just ideas in our mind. They have a purpose I guess. Like, when I think about this mountain, it's not just the stories.  
It's... *[searching for words]* It's something else...

Cora tilts her head, watching him curiously.

**Cora** What do you mean?

**Hugo** I don't know. I mean, when I think about those stories, something kind of... lights up.

They motivate me, you know? I don't know why I like the stories. But they make me want to get to the top of the mountain, that's all.

**Cora** Huh.

She stares into the air for a moment, then down at her phone, fiddling with it mindlessly. Opens one app. Closes it. Opens another. Closes it. Opens a different one. Same thing. Like she's searching for something without knowing what. With her phone in her hand, she turns back to Hugo.

**Cora** So... then why do some stories stay with us like that and others don't?

**Hugo** You're asking weird questions.

**Cora** *[joking]* And you're not helping answering them.

**Hugo** *[smiling]* So do you have an answer?

**Cora** No... but I guess it's about the connection we have with them.

**Hugo** What do you mean by connection?

**Cora** Hard to describe... I guess some stories make me feel a certain way, even if I don't know why.

**Hugo** Hm... so you mean it's more about the feeling?

**Cora** Maybe that's why some stick with us. Not because of what happened, but... because of how they felt.

**Hugo** That's... kind of scary.

**Cora** *[surprised]* What? Why?

**Hugo** Like... what if feelings keep me stuck with a story I don't like?

**Cora** Then I guess you start telling yourself a different story, or something like that.

**Hugo** *[sarcastic]* And you think it's that simple?

Hugo leans back, folding his arms across his chest. His gaze drifts to the window, but his mind feels stuck, bouncing back and forth between the words, trying to find an answer to his own questions. The bus rattles slightly as it dips into a curve. Somewhere in the back, a water bottle rolls across the floor and bumps into a seat. Someone coughs. Legs shift. Passengers murmur around them, lost in their own conversations.

**Hugo** I... I read somewhere that... like 95 percent of our thoughts run in the back of our head in the subconscious. So... most of what think and believe... we don't really know we're doing it.

**Cora** That's crazy. But where does it all come from? Those thoughts and beliefs must have started at some point, right?

**Hugo** I don't know. I think it's kind of a mystery. Unless you know?

**Cora** Hm, no clue... *[pausing]*  
But, when I think about my life, I guess I kind of... saved certain moments. Like, something happens and then it turns into a memory. Then that memory turns into a story somehow. And that story somehow keeps influencing me, even if I didn't want it to.

**Hugo** What kind of moments?

**Cora** Hm, different ones.

**Hugo** Do you still remember them?

**Cora** Some of them. But many – especially from when I was a kid – I don't even remember anymore.

**Hugo** Um, yeah... same for me.

**Cora** Why do you think that is?  
That you don't remember anymore?

**Hugo** I guess... either nothing special happened, so it didn't stick... or, maybe it was something I didn't want to remember. Like... unpleasant stuff, you know?

**Cora** Yeah, I think that... what feels unpleasant, especially when we were kids... that shapes us the most. Even if we don't remember, it kind of stays with us anyway.

**Hugo** So... what do you remember?

**Cora** Hm... one thing I remember was in primary school.

She trails off, her fingers fumbling with the case of her phone. Peeling one corner off the phone, then pressing it back in. Off again. Back in. Off again...

For a moment, she just sits there, staring at it, as if the memory had to be peeled off and pressed back into place.

Hugo waits, without saying a word. Finally, while pressing her phone back into the case, she clears her throat and looks out of the window.

**Cora** There was this one time we had a big assignment. We were supposed to, um... write a story for the class. And I really got into it, I was completely absorbed in it. I didn't finish during regular time, so, for whatever reason, my teacher let me keep writing in the corridor. There was this window with this amazing view into the trees. I sat there and kept writing. Page after page, I didn't even notice how much time passed.

**Hugo** Sounds amazing.

**Cora** It was. The best feeling, honestly. It was like I had my own little world for a while, where I could just create whatever I wanted. I liked the story I wrote and it was a really fun thing to do. Then I had to present it to the class and it was like everyone was invited into this little world of mine. Like I opened a door for them to step through with me.

For a moment, I wasn't just reading – we were all inside the same place together. Walking through the story side by side, seeing what I saw, hearing what I heard – meeting the characters that lived inside of it.

But then, out of nowhere, one kid started laughing – said it sounded boring – others joined. Instantly the door slammed shut. It was like I got kicked out of my own world and couldn't find the way back in. One second I was inside, leading them through it – and the next, I was outside, staring at a door that wouldn't open anymore. The voices in the room drowned the voices of my characters. My words suddenly felt small, like they didn't belong anywhere. And I just stood there, holding my notebook, watching the world I had built dissolve in front of me.

Cora looks down at her phone, her face reflecting in the black screen. The memory rolls through like a loop: A door opens – joy. A door slams, emptiness. Every time it returns she feels the same squeeze in her chest, the old urge to hide – or to run away. She taps the screen, checks the time. Then turns it face-down and looks up as if nothing happened.

**Cora** After that... I don't know. I didn't dare showing what I made anymore. It just felt pointless, you know? I didn't want to show myself in front of anyone and experience that same feeling again.

**Hugo** Oh...

Hugo doesn't know what to say and stays quiet. He scratches his chin with one hand, searching for words.

Cora takes a slow breath, like trying to let go of something that holds its grip.

**Cora** I just stopped sharing whatever I created. Told myself it was better that way – safer to keep it to myself.

**Hugo** That's... sad.

**Cora** Well...

**Hugo** But it sounds like you wanted to create, right? Even if you didn't show it?

**Cora** That's the weird thing – the less I shared, the more I wanted to create. I just didn't let anyone see it. I kept it hidden like a secret life.

**Hugo** Oh, wow.

**Cora** Creating something in secret felt... safe somehow. If no one knows, no one can hurt you, right?

**Hugo** Hm, I guess. Sometimes it seems easier to keep things inside.

**Cora** Yeah, but the more I kept it inside, the less I actually created. And after a while, it just stopped. Everything felt stuck – nothing could come in or out anymore. I kind of froze, caught in a numb state. With the wish to act, but unable to move.

**Hugo** Crazy... and all of that started from this one moment as a kid in school?

**Cora** I don't know if it was just that moment or a mix of other things, but somehow this one stayed with me. It sounds strange, I know... because nothing really bad even happened. And the weirdest part? I don't even remember the laughter. Or at least, I think I don't. It's like... I erased that it even happened. It was years later a friend reminded me – that one kid laughed, and others joined. And suddenly it all came back. Not the scene itself, but the feeling.

**Hugo** Huh, that's strange. If that moment stayed with you so strongly, but you don't even remember it happening, it would mean that we can be shaped by things we don't even recall anymore. Like the past just sits there and keeps waiting. *[pausing]*  
And now that you shared that story, I think some of my behaviours are like that too. They have been with me so long, I stopped asking where they came from.

**Cora** What kind of behaviours?

**Hugo** I don't know... just stupid stuff, I guess.

**Cora** Like what?

**Hugo** Um, not sure if I want to talk about it.

**Cora** Oh come on, I just told you a super embarrassing story.

**Hugo** You didn't have to.

She looks at him – waiting, eyebrows lifted. He scratches his chin, eyes drifting toward the window – staring at her reflection in the glass. His thumb taps against his leg, his mind bouncing between excuses for why not to speak.

**Hugo** Maybe now is not the right timing.

**Cora** Alright. But when is the right timing?

**Hugo** I don't know. Maybe later.

**Cora** Hm, if you say so.

The bus winds through the streets and, after a few turns, stops at a station. Some passengers step off, others step on. Behind the station, a small bistro flashes its neon sign back and forth:

*Hot Soup*  
*Now or Never!*  
*Hot Soup*  
*Now or Never!*

Again and again. Cora giggles. Hugo rolls his eyes and exhales sharply through his nose.

**Cora** *[teasing]* So? Maybe now is the right timing?

**Hugo** *[staring at the flashing sign]* Come on, it's just a random bistro sign.

**Cora** What secret soup is simmering in your head?

**Hugo** *[sarcastic]* Seriously?

**Cora** *[smiling]* Just share the recipe. Or at least the ingredients.

**Hugo** *[sighing]* Well, alright, whatever. I guess the main ingredient is overthinking.

**Cora** Okay. Was it that hard to say?

**Hugo** Well, seems easier when I think about soup.

**Cora** Then just think about soup more often.

**Hugo** But I think I'm thinking too much already. I would probably end up overthinking a soup.  
You know, sometimes I'm even overthinking the fact that I'm overthinking – which, usually, doesn't help.

**Cora** I get that. So, what do you overthink?

**Hugo** Anything.

**Cora** A few more details?

**Hugo** Um, it's often about whether people like me or not. How I'm coming across – if I'm saying the right words, doing the right thing. That kind of stuff.

**Cora** Ah, I see.

**Hugo** Sometimes I get caught in small details – my tone of voice, how I look, how I stand. I end up replaying whole conversations in my head and imagine how they might have gone differently.

**Cora** Hm.

**Hugo** Once I start thinking about it, it's hard to stop. I re-run the same scene in my head, checking all the angles: *Did I interrupt? Did I laugh too loud or too little? Did I make them uncomfortable?* And then sometimes I catch myself thinking – *why am I even doing this?*

**Cora** And? Why are you doing it?

**Hugo** I don't know... I just don't want to mess things up – so I keep checking.

**Cora** You do that while you're in the situation – or later, thinking back?

**Hugo** Um, both. Afterwards I replay it. But even in the moment I'm already shifting things – how I stand, what I say, when I smile. In my mind I circle through thoughts – reading faces, scanning every move, trying to fix things before they break.

**Cora** That's... rough.

**Hugo** I got used to it.

**Cora** But does it feel good for you?

**Hugo** Well, I don't really know any other way anymore. Even if I try to act differently, I somehow can't.

While reaching for an example, Hugo wonders why he's even talking about what he usually keeps carefully hidden. Most of the time he covers it with quick answers, little jokes, by turning the conversation back to someone else or by avoiding it in the first place. But this time, it's different.

Maybe it's because she's a stranger. Maybe it's because he will never see her again after he gets off the bus, so maybe it doesn't matter if she glimpses the cracks? He checks his watch, hoping his stop is near – but no, he's stuck on this bus for a while longer. He exhales while a scene flickers open in his mind, familiar and untouched, like it has been stored there all this time.

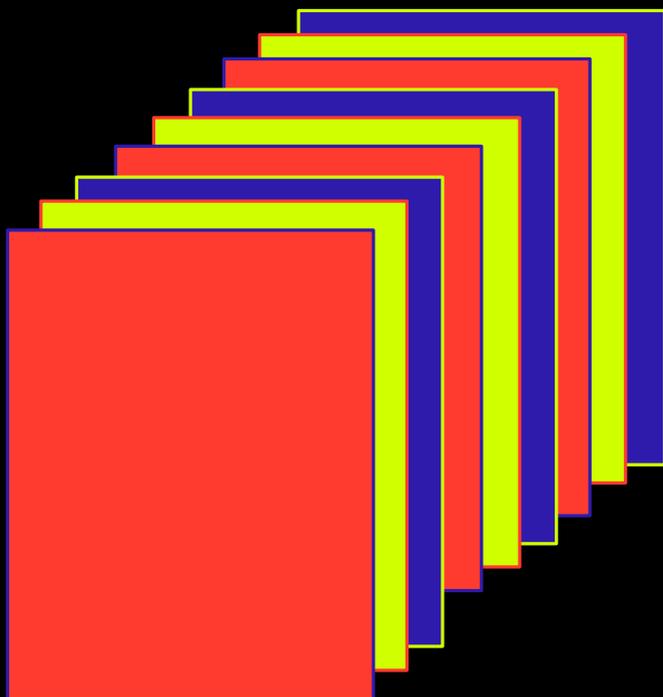
**Hugo** I had this period when I was at the peak of feeling a bit off. Like, constantly unsure about everything – my mind was always running. I kept wondering what people thought about me. Whatever I did, it never quite felt right. If I spoke, I thought I would say too much. If I stayed quiet, I felt invisible. If I smiled, it seemed forced. If I didn't, I seemed distant. Every choice felt like a wrong step. I would walk around with the sense that people were judging me, even if they weren't looking at me at all. *[pausing]*  
There was this girl. I had noticed her a couple of times, just passing by – in a café, at school, on the street. When I thought about walking up to talk to her, I froze. So, in my mind I started playing out different ways it could go, running through all the possible words I might say. Over and over again.

Trying to say the right thing, act the right way, you know? But every time I saw her... I couldn't move or say a word – it was like my mind just shut off.

**Cora** Oh, wow.

**Hugo** Then one day, I went to my favourite coffee place, still running through all the ways I might talk to her, ways not to look like a fool. I ordered a drink, but the noise around me was too much to think straight. The barista slid the cup across the counter. I grabbed it and turned around, looking for a place to sit – and there she was. Sitting by the entrance – looking at me. The whole moment seemed to freeze, the world turning into a still image. Nothing moved – except her face, softening into the smallest smile, almost invisible. At least, I thought it would. I stood there a bit too long, adding sugar to my coffee I didn't need, asking the barista for the receipt that I never wanted. I glanced back. She was reading a book, but her eyes kept flicking between the pages and me. My pulse hammered in my chest. My legs started shaking. My throat turned dry. The heat of the cup burned into my hand. The room felt warmer than before – I tried to take a breath, but it got stuck halfway.

*Which story keeps shaping you?*



# Story

Half the time

I'm living in between

Imagined lies

But she's the prettiest I've seen

She snaps me out

Of my permanent day dream

Coffee queue

My senses were prepared

But then there's you

And then I wonder

How I dared to smile back

Or to even walk in here

Looking inside I couldn't see beyond  
The drab colours of daily life  
I somehow got used to have  
Dreaming of dancing on the silver lining  
Here and now  
It's never the right timing

I'd like to say forever (don't say forever)

But this doesn't leave you space

If it feels any better (not together)

I'll let the ocean navigate

I guess sometimes to flatter

Is to view it as a game

I would rather  
Speak my mind  
But wait

Why live a story already told  
Why leave a story untold

In my mind I circle in anxiety  
I should take time  
Till I find what's meant for me  
The more I force  
My control is fading

But I'm already feeling  
That my life's gonna change  
Still your high note flies  
Above my vocal range  
I wanna shout it  
At the top of my lungs  
Still I'm silently waiting

I'd like to say forever (don't say forever)

But this doesn't leave you space

If it feels any better (not together)

I'll let the ocean navigate

I guess sometimes to flatter

Is to view it as a game

I would rather

Speak my mind

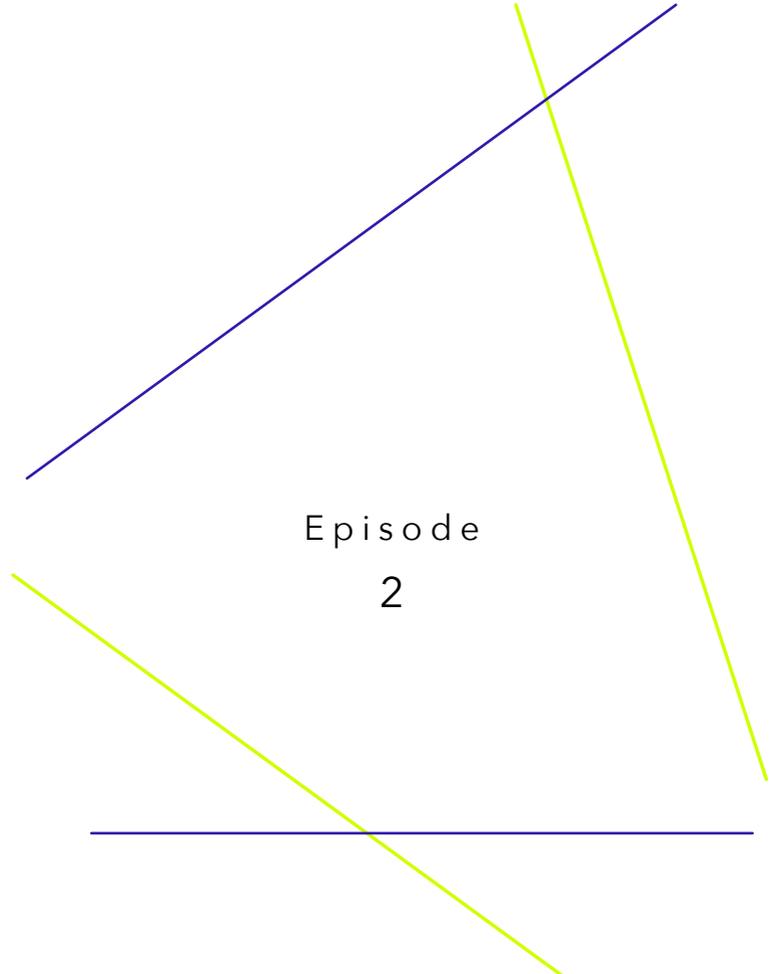
But wait

Why live a story already told

Why leave a story untold

Stories already told

Why leave a story untold



Episode  
2

## Episode 2

**Cora** And? What happened next?

**Hugo** I started walking towards her. I smiled. Said *hey* and walked right out of the door.

**Cora** Wait... what? That was the perfect timing to talk to her!

**Hugo** *[defensive]* But I didn't know what to say.

**Cora** *[irritated]* Just say something. Anything.

**Hugo** Like what?

**Cora** Just ask what book she's reading. Or ask if she knows the wifi password.

**Hugo** *[surprised]* The wifi password?

**Cora** *[amused]* Well... better than walking out the door.

**Hugo** *[sarcastic]* Great...

**Cora** At least you would have started a conversation.

**Hugo** And then what?

**Cora** Then just... talk? It's no big deal – you're doing it right now.

**Hugo** But I didn't want to say something stupid.

**Cora** *[sarcastic]* So, what? Now you never talk to anyone anymore, just in case?

**Hugo** No, you don't get it. That situation was different.

**Cora** Why?

**Hugo** I mean, what if she doesn't like me, or what if she thinks I'm weird, or...

**Cora** *[interrupting]* Then you deal with it when it happens – not before. You had nothing to lose anyway, did you?

**Hugo** Well, it felt like I had to lose something.

Hugo's mind spins around the question of what he had to lose in that moment. It wasn't money. It wasn't his job. He wouldn't lose his friends, or a place to live, or anything that actually mattered in the long run. He couldn't find an answer – nothing concrete, at least. But still, standing there, it felt like one wrong word could break everything.

**Hugo** I don't know what it was, but it felt real, you know? Like, if I screwed up I somehow lost the whole game right away.

**Cora** But you didn't even start playing. If it was a game you would just lose a point and continue playing, right? It's never game over right away.

**Hugo** But then why does it feel so real?

**Cora** No clue. What do you think happens if you screwed up?

**Hugo** Um... maybe that she doesn't want to deal with me once she saw who I was.

**Cora** But you never showed her who that is.

**Hugo** I guess...?

**Cora** How could someone get to know you if you're not showing yourself?

**Hugo** Well, I don't know. I think I've spent so much time adjusting and trying to be whatever the moment needed – or at least what I thought it needed – that I don't even know what feels like... me.

**Cora** Yeah, I get that. But the thing is, how long can you keep pretending to be someone else before something inside you starts to resist?

**Hugo** What do you mean?

**Cora** I mean... sometimes it feels like we end up in the same situations again and again. Until we finally understand what they're about.

**Hugo** I have no clue what this situation was about.

**Cora** Then maybe that's what you need to figure out.

Hugo exhales, leaning back against his seat, his gaze drifting toward the window. A small fly is sitting on the glass, unmoving. Hugo watches it for a while, then wonders:

*Do flies care about what others think of them?*

The low hum of the bus engine fills the space. The bus driver shifts in his seat and grabs the microphone.

**Driver** The next stop is coming up. You know the game by now, stay seated till we stop, and mind the gap when you step off. Enjoy the rest of your day.

He puts the microphone back and slows down until he comes to a hold. The doors hiss open and two teenagers stumble onto the bus, talking over each other at full speed. Neither listens, both talk and laugh so much they can hardly stay upright. Their faces are buried under makeup, so thick it's impossible to guess what's underneath – as if they were making sure to erase their natural selves before stepping outside. They tumble into the back seats, laughter still spilling in bursts. But within seconds both have pulled out their phones and the noise cuts off. Their eyes get pulled into the glow of their screens, and the bus rolls on. At the very next stop, one of them suddenly yelps. They jump off their seats, shouting over each other, realising they were on the wrong bus.

Laughing again, they stumble out through the doors – and before their sneakers hit the ground, one of them is already calling a friend, breathless, retelling the story as if it were the best joke of the day. The doors close and the laughter vanishes as quickly as it had arrived. As the bus pulls away, Hugo spots the two teenagers striking poses, using the vehicle as the background for snapping selfies.

**Hugo** *[amused]* Must be a great story for them.

**Cora** Yeah, I'm sure it will only get better once they start telling it to others.

**Hugo** I bet.

**Cora** *[teasing]* Speaking of a great story. You wanted to figure out what the situation in the coffee place was trying to tell you.

**Hugo** Oh, really? Already forgot about that.

**Cora** *[joking]* You're lucky that I'm reminding you.

**Hugo** *[sarcastic]* Yeah... lucky me.

**Cora** You can also avoid figuring it out.

**Hugo** Yeah... that sounds better.

**Cora** But then the situation will just circle back again.

**Hugo** What do you mean?

**Cora** Just think about it: How many times did you end up in the same kind of situation? Like... you try to get rid of something, but it keeps coming back, just in a different setting. That moment in the coffee place – the freezing, the overthinking, the not knowing what to say – was that the only time it happened?

**Hugo** Um, I guess... no. I think it happened a lot.

**Cora** You see?

**Hugo** But isn't that how life just is? Things repeat.

**Cora** Or... it's trying to tell you something. And it will keep knocking until you notice. Sometimes it seems to me like we're ignoring a part of ourselves and then life finds a way to challenge us – but who knows.

**Hugo** *[doubting]* And you really believe that?

**Cora** I tried to ignore a lot and kept pushing it away. But somehow... it always came back – like it was just waiting. Waiting for me to finally stop and look at it. Sometimes it feels like certain things happen for a reason – like a push.

**Hugo** Hm, I don't know. Sounds kinda weird.

**Cora** Well... I guess some things only start to make sense once you've gone through them – and not before.

**Hugo** And you think you have?

**Cora** Well, something happened that kind of... shook me awake a little, I guess.

**Hugo** What do you mean?

**Cora** Hm... It's a weird story – I'm not sure if I want to talk about it.

**Hugo** Oh come on, I just told you mine.

**Cora** Yeah, I know. It's just... I don't usually talk about this.

**Hugo** Alright, fair enough. But for the record, I also usually don't talk about myself to strangers.

Cora doesn't say anything. Her fingers curl slightly around the edge of her sleeve. Even thinking about the story makes her body tense. She has told this to barely anyone. And now here she is, on a bus, next to a stranger, wondering if it would be completely stupid – or maybe freeing – to finally let it out. There is something about talking to someone who knows nothing about you. You can say things without having to protect anyone's image of who you are. Maybe that's why it feels safe – no shared past, no expectation, no consequences. She exhales, barely audible. Then, almost like she's surprising herself.

**Cora** Alright.

So... one night I was on my way back home from a friend's place.

It was late.

The streets were almost empty.

I walked through the dark.

I was almost home.

Close to my building, I passed a group coming from the other way.

I didn't think much of it. Kept walking.

Then I felt it.

A shift. Something different.

Like the hair on my neck standing up.

I could feel them stop. Feel them turn.

Their eyes cutting through me.

They started walking again.

This time they changed direction.

They were behind me. Following.

I walked faster.  
My heart pounding inside my chest.  
Their steps speeding up.  
Getting closer.

I started running.  
Just a few houses away.  
Their footsteps behind me.

Too steady.  
Too close.  
I didn't dare to look back.

I reached my building.  
Breathing fast.

Hands shaking.  
Searching for the keys.  
Fumbling.

Dropping them.  
Metal clashing on stone.  
Picking them up.

Trying again.  
Missing the lock.

Scratching against it.  
Forcing it in.

Opening the door.  
Rushing inside.  
Slamming it shut.  
Locking it.

The door was glass.  
Clear.  
Thin.  
Almost too thin.

I took a breath and turned around.  
There they were.  
Facing me.

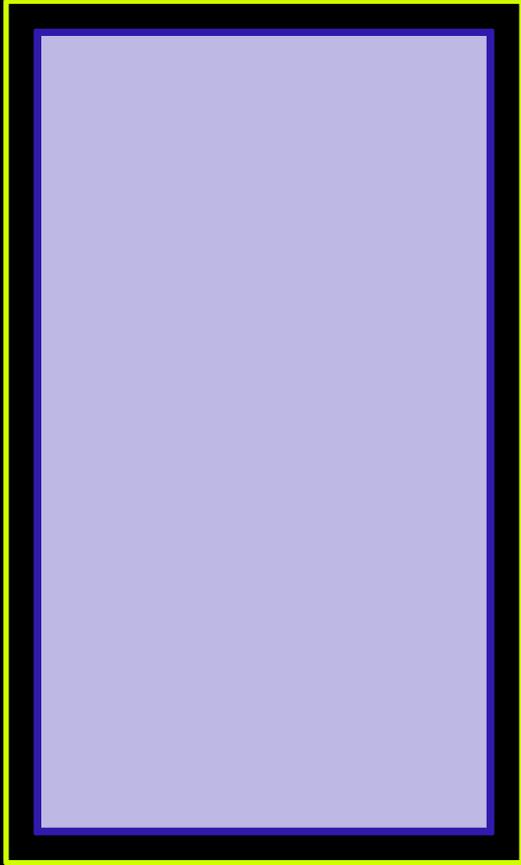
In between us, only glass.  
The whole group.

Standing.  
Watching.  
Waiting.

A hand hit the glass.  
Then another.  
Then a kick.

The door shook.  
And I stood there.  
Frozen.

*What story hurt you?*



# Door of Glass

What do you see  
When you close your eyes

What do you hear  
When there is no noise

Here we are  
Face to face  
In between us  
A door of glass

Why do you follow me  
Why don't you follow your dreams



Episode  
3

## Episode 3

**Cora** Unable to move.  
My breath stuck.  
My feet glued to the ground.

If I moved.  
They would break through.  
So I froze.

Standing on the other side.  
Close.  
Too close.

Staring at me.  
Cold.  
Unblinking.

Their fists. Hitting.  
Their feet. Kicking.  
Again and again.  
The whole door shook with every blow.

I had to move.

Rushed upstairs. Slammed the next door shut.  
Locking it. Pressing my back against the frame.

Hearing them outside. Trying to get in.  
For what felt like forever.  
My heart kept punching my chest.

I was lucky. They didn't get in.

But even after they were gone, it didn't feel over.  
For days I felt on edge. Every time I walked home, my  
heart pounded.  
Every sound behind me made my skin crawl.  
I told myself to forget about it. To move on.  
But my body didn't forget.

A few weeks later the nightmares started.  
Waking up. Full of sweat. My heart racing.  
In my dreams I was still running. Still being followed.  
Every night the same thing. I didn't know what to do.

Cora stares into the air, the memory rolling in front of her eyes  
like a movie scene. Hugo's heart hits against his chest. He hasn't  
noticed how deeply the story struck him.

**Hugo** Wow. That's... that's crazy!

**Cora** Yeah, never experienced something like that before.

**Hugo** Do you still think about it a lot?

**Cora** Hm, yeah it's still there. But I see it differently now.

**Hugo** Like what?

**Cora** Well... for a while I felt very negative about it. I asked *why* a million times. *Why me? Why then? Why did they do it?* The same questions kept circling in my head, over and over. I didn't seem to find any answers in asking those questions. I had to do something different, so I started writing it all down. Everything. Every detail. Every feeling. Just to get it out of me. And slowly, something began to change. Out of a memory grew something I could shape – something I could bend. It was like finding another way to process. And it all ended up in a piece of music. I had never finished song before. I didn't even know how to do it – but somehow it happened.

**Hugo** Oh wow.

**Cora** So, turning a bad memory into something creative helped me somehow. It's like another side of the story appears. Suddenly it's not just the fear, but also the gift that came out of it.

**Hugo** What gift?

**Cora** Well... for me, expressing creativity, which I had suppressed before.

**Hugo** I see... so you mean a story can have more than one side? Even when one is painful, there is another one?

**Cora** Well... in my case there was more than just the bad part, although I couldn't see that for a long time. But it was a challenge to find that hidden part that's hardly visible at first sight.

**Hugo** Hm...

**Cora** I mean... for years, I wanted to write songs. I started so many, bits and pieces here and there. And I had this dream of creating a whole album. But I could never even finish one song.

**Hugo** Why not?

**Cora** No clue – I would always find a reason. Like, when I got close to the end I suddenly lost interest, or I would convince myself it wasn't good enough, or I just didn't have enough time. I had my excuses – suddenly a hundred little tasks seemed more important. But... if I'm honest – most of the time it was me standing in my own way.

**Hugo** And you think that night changed it?

**Cora** Well... it felt horrible for quite a while. But somehow it opened something – a way back to what I was avoiding for years. I didn't even realise how far I had drifted away until I started creating again.

**Hugo** Hm... I don't think I would be able to see anything good in a story like that.

**Cora** Yeah, I couldn't either. I was completely stuck in fear and felt like a helpless victim – that was the whole story I saw for a while.

**Hugo** Yeah... I think I also know the victim part.

**Cora** Yeah, I guess many of us know that role. It's not easy to step back for a while, to even realise that there is another version. But I guess once you do – it's like a choice. Either staying stuck in the old story, or start taking responsibility for changing it.

**Hugo** But... it's so easy to only believe the bad version – the victim part feels so solid. Like thinking: *this is just how it happened*. End of story.

**Cora** I know. It feels so real in the moment, right? But sometimes I wonder... what if the story keeps coming back just because there's still something that wants to be seen? And if we don't find it – it just repeats. Different time, different place, different people, but the same message – until we find it.

**Hugo** Even if the story is full of pain?

**Cora** I mean, maybe it hurts less when we stop seeing it as something against us and start seeing it as something trying to help us.

**Hugo** That sounds smart and wise in theory. But honestly, I don't think I could believe that – even if part of me would like to.

**Cora** Yeah, I know... but maybe try thinking of it as a game.

**Hugo** A game?

**Cora** Like a puzzle – or a quest. You know those escape rooms?

**Hugo** Um... yeah?

**Cora** You have to figure out the clues to move on. Otherwise you stay stuck in the same room – until you solve it.

**Hugo** Ugh... that sounds awful. I would probably just sit in the corner and wait for the staff to come in and say: *'Alright, we're closing now, time to leave.'*

**Cora** Haha, well... what if there is no staff and you have to find the key yourself?

**Hugo** Then I'm lost.

**Cora** Well... even more of a reason to start solving the puzzle. I mean... I don't know if there's any other way. *[joking]* But hey, let me know if you find one.

**Hugo** I don't even know where to start looking.

**Cora** Hm... what do you think the story you shared is telling you about yourself?

**Hugo** ... I don't know. I mean, I never really thought about that.

**Cora** Well... there is your puzzle.

Hugo drifts into a mental labyrinth – an escape room built of thoughts. He scans the walls, searching for a clue, replaying every clue, trying to remember what it actually is he is supposed to solve. As he looks around the room for a hint, he notices someone sitting in the corner. The person stares into nothing – still, passive. Hugo wants to ask for a clue but freezes instead. Something about him feels familiar, like he has seen him before, but can't recall where. His mind starts spinning:

*What is this person doing in my room?*

*Should I tell him to leave?*

*Why can't I just go over and talk to him?*

He tries to take a step toward the figure, but his feet feel glued to the floor. He pulls one foot free – and suddenly the room vanishes. He's back on the bus – feeling irritated. Lifting a toe, testing if his feet are still stuck, but they move easily – as if nothing ever held him. Hugo glances to the side, checking if Cora saw the figure too, but she's staring into her book. When she notices him looking, she lowers the pages and raises an eyebrow.

**Cora** *[smiling]* And? Solved the puzzle?

**Hugo** Um, no. But maybe one clue closer.

**Cora** *[joking]* What's the clue, Sherlock?

**Hugo** I think it's something about connecting with others. Something holds me back from it. It's like there's this invisible glue keeping me in place – maybe that's what the story is trying to tell.

**Cora** And? Where do you think that comes from?

**Hugo** I don't know. I guess I believe that if I connect... I will get rejected. But I don't even know where that is coming from.

**Cora** It's crazy, right? We have no clue where it's coming from and still here we are, believing something so strongly – even when it hurts us.

**Hugo** Yeah... I actually can't imagine what life would be like without that belief.

**Cora** And so we end up hiding – behind whatever seems to be safe. At least it feels like hiding to me.

**Hugo** Sometimes I think... it would all be easier if other people just changed.

**Cora** *[teasing]* Oh... so that you wouldn't have to?

**Hugo** Well, if other people changed, I would have less problems.

**Cora** So, what do you want them to change?

**Hugo** I guess... to not put so much pressure on me, so that I don't have to keep adjusting all the time.

**Cora** But are they really the ones putting pressure on you?

**Hugo** Well, who else is?

Cora looks at him, like she is waiting for him to answer his own question. Hugo stays quiet, hoping to get an answer from her. For a while, they both just sit and wait for the other one to speak.

Slowly, Hugo realises he's not getting the answer he was waiting for. His thoughts turn inward, the question circling in his mind. He stares out the window – but wherever he looks, the question follows.

*[pause]*

On the glass of the window, his own face looks back at him. It isn't the reflection that surprises him, but what it shows. Pressure. Expectation. Doubt. For a moment, he stares at himself. Getting lost in thoughts, drifting further and further – jumping from one memory to another, catching fragments. Unable to hold on to any, as new ones pull him away. His thoughts are racing, chasing each other as if there were something to win. The bus rumbles beneath his feet. He turns his head – Cora is watching him, her expression unchanged. Still waiting, as if no time had passed at all.

**Hugo** Well, okay. Maybe I'm putting a little pressure on myself.

**Cora** A little?

**Hugo** Well, maybe more than a little, I guess. I don't even know what it would be like without it – that would probably be weird.

**Cora** Not putting pressure on you would be weird?

**Hugo** Yeah... I mean – no. I don't know how to say it.

**Cora** What do you get out of it?

**Hugo** Um, I think it's familiar. It's like – if I push myself hard enough, I probably won't fail. I know the feeling so well. Without it... I don't know if I would make it.

**Cora** And what if you did an experiment and tried to not push yourself? Just once, to see how it is – letting it be weird, you know?

**Hugo** And then?

**Cora** I don't know. See what happens.

**Hugo** *[sarcastic]* Wow. Can't wait.

**Cora** Maybe you will like it.

**Hugo** Maybe. I guess we will see.

**Cora** *[joking]* Well... try it first.

**Hugo** Maybe later.

Cora giggles and dives back into her book. Hugo turns to the window and remembers moments where he forced himself. Pushing himself to do things he didn't want to do, acting in ways that never felt like him, saying words that didn't belong in his mouth. And what for? What did he get out of it? What did he get in return? He feels like an actor who doesn't know his lines – waiting for the director to whisper what to say. The scenes keep rolling in his mind, and still he keeps playing along. Maybe that's what exhausts him most – not the effort itself, but the pretending. The need to keep up an image of himself – this facade that shouldn't break. For a moment, he wonders what would happen if he simply stopped performing.

**Hugo** You know...

I used to think I had it all figured out.

Like, I knew how this game works.

Just play by the rules.

Fit in.

Keep things smooth.

Don't make noise.

Do what's expected and everything will be fine.  
That's what they say, right? It seemed like there was  
this invisible book of rules.

And I was constantly trying to not break them.

Keep smiling.

Stay useful.

Be polite.

Don't take up too much space.

But the more I think about it, the stranger those  
rules seem.

Like they were never meant to help me – but just to  
hold me in line.

Keeping me quiet. Keeping me small.

And the wild thing is:

I believed them.

I picked them up.

I followed them.  
I made them part of me.

And now, they play in the background.  
Or they even play me.  
Like old tapes I didn't even know were still running.

I'm starting to wonder:  
How much of what I believe is just... repetition?

Like habits dressed up as truth.  
Maybe I've just been performing this role.  
Trying to be who I think I'm supposed to be.  
Without even knowing who that is.

And some of it feels so real.  
The pressure.  
The doubt.  
The need to prove myself.

The voice in my head:

Don't mess it up.

Don't be too much.

Don't make it weird.

Just work harder.

Just pretend it's fine.

Just say yes one more time.

I don't even know whose voice that is.

But it's loud.

So the question is:

What happens if I stop listening to it?

What if it's not even true?

What if I've been hiding this whole time?

*Which part are you hiding?*



# M a s k

Let's take off our mask

And show who we are

Let's not be afraid

To share our scar

Let's open our mind

Letting it all go

Let's blow away our mask  
And show what's behind  
Let's face our dream  
And be the way we are  
Without a mask

Let's break off our mask  
And reveal what's inside  
Let's share what we can find  
And leave fear behind  
Let's start to reconnect  
And find our own way back

Let's blow away our mask

And show what's behind

Let's face our dream

And be the way we are

We're hiding from our self  
So scared to look inside  
Instead of sharing with the world  
We are creating our mask

We're hiding from our truth  
So scared of what's behind  
Instead of changing our world  
We are painting our mask

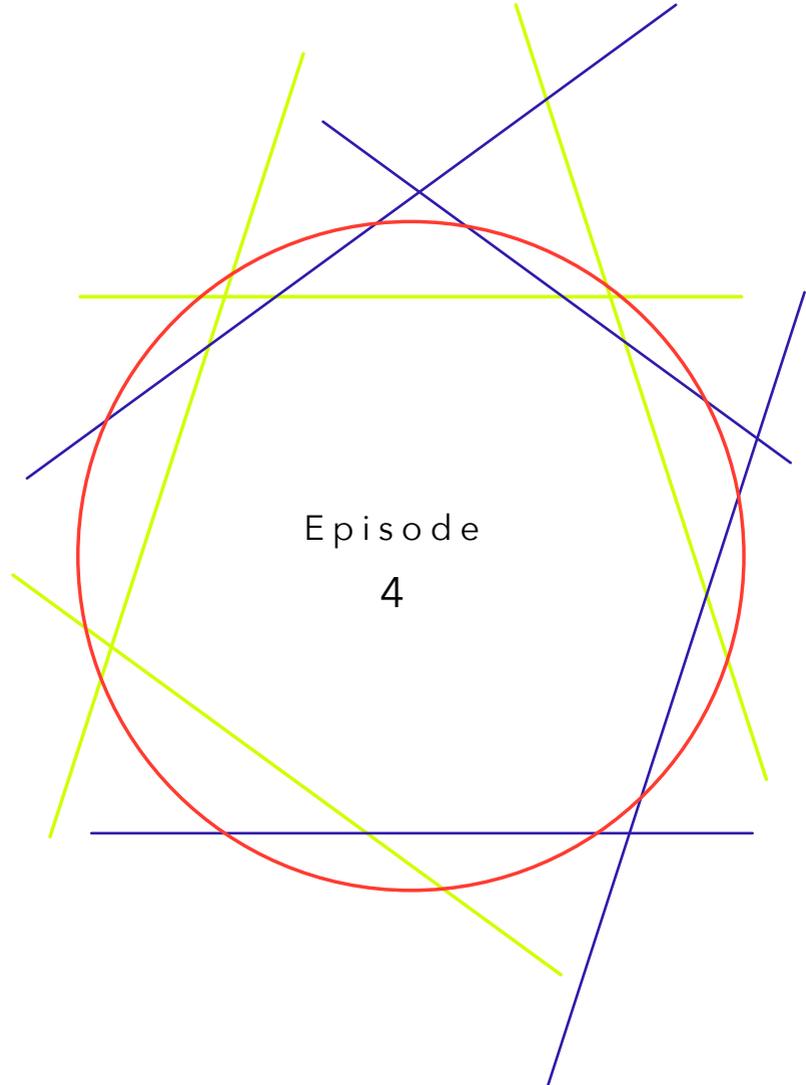
We're hiding from our light  
So scared to move inside  
Instead of caring for the world

We are living our mask

We are painting our mask

We are creating our mask

We just imagine our mask

A red circle is centered on the page. It is overlaid with several intersecting lines. There are three blue lines and three green lines. The blue lines are: one horizontal line at the top, one horizontal line at the bottom, and one diagonal line from the top-left to the bottom-right. The green lines are: one horizontal line at the top, one horizontal line at the bottom, and one diagonal line from the top-right to the bottom-left. The lines intersect to form a complex geometric pattern around the circle.

Episode  
4

## Episode 4

**Hugo** And maybe the scariest part is:  
What's left when I stop playing by the rules?

Hugo hesitates. His thumb stops tapping. Hands lie still on his legs. For a moment he just stares through the glass – past his own reflection, into the sky.

Everything seems to pause. His breath holds, his thoughts drift into silence. He hears a soft noise, something he hadn't noticed before. A bird glides by with open wings – he watches it move through the air, drifting, shifting, circling back, without any planned pattern. It doesn't seem to follow anyone or any rules. It doesn't ask for permission, it simply flies. How strange, he thinks, that he totally forgot how to move like that – free of direction, without the need for approval. For a while he just watches, tracing its path through the wind, imagining how it would look if the bird left a visible trail, like an airplane – patterns hanging in the air, paintings drawn on nothing. But then he realises that it might not be such a good idea – the sky would probably look foggy all the time. He turns back to Cora and sees her staring at the floor. No movement. No reaction.

For a second, Hugo wonders if he said something wrong. If maybe he made her uncomfortable. That old voice coming back: *You went too far. You made it awkward. You shouldn't have done it.* But then, Cora lifts her head and smiles.

**Hugo** [calm] Sorry, I think I lost track of where I was going.

**Cora** No worries. It drifted somewhere nice, actually.

**Hugo** But even if I were willing to stop hiding. I think I wouldn't know how to start living a new story – or at least a better one, you know?

**Cora** Hm, I also don't know. It's always easier to just talk about this stuff than actually doing it.

**Hugo** Huh, so... now what?

**Cora** I don't know. Still trying to figure it out.  
That's actually why I started this trip in the first place.

**Hugo** Why? To live a new story?

**Cora** Hm... to find clarity, I guess. It's just so hard to do that in daily life. There is so much distraction – I needed some distance.

**Hugo** Yeah... I think I know what you mean. *[pausing]*  
Did you get any answers during your journey?

**Cora** Hm... one thing I've learned recently is that we have to find and accept the hidden parts.

**Hugo** Which hidden parts?

**Cora** Some call it the shadows we push away – the parts we ignore and hide. The fears we don't talk about. The feelings we bury. The desires we're ashamed to admit. The voices inside we call wrong.

**Hugo** Okay, I think I get it.

**Cora** The more we hide them, the more they shape us.

**Hugo** But... what if we don't even realise which parts we're hiding?

**Cora** Then that's our puzzle to figure out.

**Hugo** Oh, not more puzzles.

**Cora** *[amused]* Better get used to it.

**Hugo** *[sarcastic]* Great.

**Cora** Maybe we need to look at them to move into a new chapter.

**Hugo** Hm... But what if it's scary what the next chapter brings? Maybe it's easier to stick with the story we already know and be fine with it.

**Cora** But what if the next chapter is exactly what you have been waiting for?

**Hugo** Hm... I don't know. Somehow I don't want to lose the version of me I got used to.

**Cora** Yeah, I get that. But maybe some stories need to end, so new ones can begin – even if it seems scary.

**Hugo** But... how do I even know which story I'm supposed to begin? What if I pick the wrong one and regret it later?

Cora and Hugo sit silently for a while, both staring out the window, circling around the same question:

*How do you know which story you are supposed to live?*

*[pause]*

The bus driver – sitting diagonally in front of them – tilts his head slightly. His eyes flick to the mirror, catching a glimpse of Cora and Hugo from the corner of his eye – just for a second. Then he looks back at the road, his hands steady on the wheel. Cora and Hugo stare into the distance, their eyes empty, drifting through the landscapes of their minds. Corridors of thoughts, hidden rooms of questions. Passing doors that never have been opened. Flickering shadows on the walls, painting forgotten memories waiting to be seen. The bus keeps rolling, through a world paused mid frame. Without taking his eyes off the road, the driver reaches for the volume knob and turns the music softer.

**Driver** Not so easy to listen past the noise, huh?

Cora and Hugo get snapped out of their daydream. For the first time, they truly notice him. They exchange a quick glance, then lean forward slightly, shifting in their seats to get a better look at the man who, until now, had been nothing more than the silent figure steering the bus. For a second, they wonder if he was talking to everyone. But no one reacts – it doesn't seem like anyone noticed him at all. A flicker of doubt crosses their minds: *Did he actually speak, or were they only imagining it?* They wait for something to happen. His eyes stay on the road – steady and focused.

Slowly, he takes a long inhale. His chest rises, his fingers resting on the wheel. He holds the breath at its peak – and for a moment, time seems to stop. Then, just as smoothly, he exhales. For a moment nothing happens. He says nothing, just keeps driving – Cora and Hugo staring at him. His head turns slightly. The corner of his eyes catching them, his eyebrows lifting the smallest bit.

**Driver** So?

**Hugo** *[confused]* So, what?

**Driver** You seemed to be far away.

**Cora** What do you mean?

**Driver** Well, sometimes our body is here, but the rest of us is somewhere else, huh?

**Hugo** Somewhere else? I don't get it.

**Driver** Stuck in the mind. Busy thinking about things.

**Hugo** Well, there is always something to think about.

**Driver** *[smiling]* You think so?

**Hugo** I mean, thoughts never really stop.

**Driver** If you say so.

**Cora** What are you trying to say?

**Driver** I'm not trying to say anything.

**Hugo** What? I'm confused.

**Cora** Me too.

**Driver** Never mind.

Cora and Hugo exchange a puzzled look – wondering if this is a prank or if they should even take him seriously. His words sound cryptic, as if he doesn't know what he is talking about.

**Cora** What do you mean?

**Driver** I mean, maybe there is a better place to be.

**Hugo** I could think of a few places that would be better right now.

**Driver** And where is that?

**Hugo** At the final stop for example.

**Driver** But you're still here on the bus.

**Hugo** That's the problem.

**Driver** So your only chance is to find a different place inside.

**Hugo** Inside where?

**Driver** Inside yourself?

**Hugo** I'm lost.

**Driver** *[laughing]* I see that.

**Cora** What different place inside do you mean?

**Driver** Ever tried checking in with your heart?

**Hugo** What?

**Driver** People always check the time, check the map, check the phone – but never really check their heart.

**Cora** What do you mean?

**Driver** Well, you know the heart has its own little brain in it?

**Hugo** *[skeptical]* A brain?

**Driver** Yeah. A whole bunch of nerves that can actually take decisions on their own.

**Hugo** But... how? I mean, we don't think with the heart.

**Driver** Exactly. That's kind of the problem, isn't it? We're so used to being stuck in our head that we don't even notice it.

**Hugo** I never heard of that.

**Driver** Well, now you did.

**Cora** But how do you check the heart?

**Driver** Before you get into that you need to do something else.

**Cora** And what?

**Driver** Stop distracting yourself. Look around.

Hugo and Cora glance around. Most of the passengers are staring into their phones, their faces bathing in the glow of their screens. Fingers scrolling. Eyes empty. Lost in a world behind the glass, far from here. As they scroll, their faces flicker in shifting light – sometimes a smile flashes for a moment, then fades, leaving the same stone-like stillness behind. Only near the back, a small child presses its face against the window, nose touching the glass. Eyes wide open, fixed on the sky – watching the stars, as if seeing something no one else does.

**Driver** You see? We are numbing ourselves. Always scrolling. Always consuming. Never resting. We get pulled into all kinds of directions when we don't really know where we're supposed to be.

**Hugo** Well, I think I don't know where I'm supposed to be.

**Cora** Yeah, same here.

**Driver** That's because you're thinking of where as a place. But it's not about that. It doesn't matter where your body is, it's more about where your attention is. You will always feel lost if your mind keeps running around without your heart.

**Cora** Hm. So what can we do about it?

**Driver** Just pause and get quiet for a moment.

The driver falls silent. Cora and Hugo look irritated at each other – unsure how they ended up in this conversation. None of the other passengers even seem to notice what's going on. Everyone is caught up in their own lives. Faces still bathing in screen light. Cora shifts in her seat. Hugo's thumb taps on his leg. Their minds spin in circles, reaching for something to hold onto. Something about the moment feels strange. Too many thoughts. Too much noise. Too little space. Hugo is the first to give up. He exhales sharply through his nose and leans back, rubbing his hands over his face.

**Hugo** There is just so much to think about.

**Driver** There is! And it will never stop.

**Hugo** So what now?

**Driver** There is nothing wrong about having thoughts. But let them come and go like clouds. As soon as you touch your thoughts and hold on to them you will get caught judging and analysing – then you're not able to follow your heart.

**Hugo** I thought follow your heart is just a saying.

**Driver** It is just a saying when you forget the meaning. But it's truth when you live it. So the question is not whether it's true – the question is whether you're open to listen to it.

**Hugo** But I don't know how to listen to my heart.

**Driver** Then better start checking it out.

**Hugo** But how?

**Driver** Feel it. Be aware of it.

For a moment, they just sit there – unsure what to do. Cora holds her breath without noticing. Hugo tries to think his way into the heart, at the same time wondering how long it would take to finally arrive at his bus stop.

*[pause]*

**Hugo** Why are we doing this?

**Driver** To check out what you feel.

**Hugo** I don't feel anything. Do you?

**Cora** Hm... I feel something. But it hurts a bit in that area.

**Driver** That's normal, stuff builds up over time. Old pain we didn't deal with – it doesn't just disappear. The heart kind of holds onto it until we're ready to let it move through.

**Hugo** What? Why would I want to feel something that hurts?

**Driver** Because pushing it away doesn't make it go anywhere, it just sticks around and waits. Even the rough stuff you don't want to see is still part of you. You can't really choose which feelings are inside – you need to face them at some point.

**Cora** So... you mean it's easier to feel what's inside than running from it?

**Driver** Easier? No. It's easier to run away – at least for a while. But the longer you run, the heavier it gets.

**Hugo** *[mumbling]* I wish I had taken a different bus.

**Driver** You wanna get off? You can stop any time.

**Hugo** No, no. I'm good for now.

**Driver** Good choice. Actually there is no way to stop here anyway.

**Hugo** *[sarcastic]* Great.

**Cora** So... what happens when you face the feeling?

**Driver** Depends on the day. Sometimes it just feels like sitting in a storm. Other times it's so soft that it's hard to notice at all. But either way, once you stop fighting it, something shifts. Not always fast, but something will change.

**Hugo** And you? Are you able to feel your heart?

**Driver** Sometimes, but not always. For quite a while I was stuck in my head – couldn't feel a damn thing. Just thoughts. Stress. Problems. And many more thoughts. But when I started practicing – little by little it got easier.

**Cora** How was it before?

**Driver** Huh. I got pissed off at everything. Especially how people drive out there. I would curse all day. Honking, swearing, wanting to quit this job every damn morning. I was distracting myself – smoked like a chimney. Couldn't wait for the next break just to light one up – thought it would help me relax. But I'm telling you... I just couldn't sit with myself.

**Cora** And that changed?

**Driver** Pff, I wouldn't go back to how I was before. No way.

**Cora** But how is it now?

**Driver** Now? Everything just feels... clearer. Like the fog lifted. I still see things that suck and annoy me, but I don't have to react right away. I don't need to judge everything, I just drive the damn bus. And let me tell you, now I actually enjoy it. I realised that it doesn't matter what I'm doing, or where I am. I don't feel like I have to run away anymore. And you know what? Turns out, life's a hell of a lot easier when you're not always trying to escape it.

**Cora** Oh, I want that too.

**Driver** Well, then start getting used to living more in your heart. And just watch – things around you will start to shift.

Suddenly, without warning a car cuts sharply in front of the bus. The driver hits the brake. The bus jolts. Cora and Hugo grip their seats. The driver's arm shoots up in reflex, like he's about to shout something. His mouth opens...

**Driver** *[mumbling]* Oh come on, you absolute...

His jaw locks. No words. His hands tense on the wheel as he exhales sharply through his nose.

One breath. Then another – softer this time. Slowly, his body softens again.

**Hugo** Didn't you say you don't have to react to things anymore?

**Driver** Doesn't mean I always remember.

**Cora** *[joking]* At least you didn't honk.

**Driver** Yeah. Progress. It's easy to get trapped. Just don't expect it to work all the time. You'll get thrown out again and again – the mind always tries to grab the wheel back and wants to run the show. It thinks it's losing control when you start feeling. But if you stay with the heart, it slowly opens, and the head learns to quiet down.

Maybe it's just about noticing when you snap out of the heart – and remember you can return. Every time you come back, it gets a little easier. In time, the head learns to follow – that's when they start working together.

**Hugo** Sounds so strange to me.

**Driver** Your head is still telling you stories. It doesn't want to lose control.

**Cora** So how do we stop that?

**Driver** You don't. Just observe what the stories are and what they want to tell you. They will keep showing up – sometimes over and over. But you don't have to believe them. Drop into your heart instead – that's where the real magic is.

**Hugo** And what do we do when we get there?

**Driver** Check it out – see how it feels. Explore it and then do the thing that lights you up – that's usually a good place to be.

**Cora** So... how do we get into it?

**Driver** Start simple. Take a breath. Feel your heart beat.  
Just sit with it. Let the thoughts come, but don't chase them. Listen. Observe. Everything you need is already there. You have just been too busy to hear it.

Neither of them answers. The driver's words still bounce around inside their heads, colliding with everything they used to believe. Cora exhales slowly. Hugo shifts in his seat. Then, almost at the same time, they close their eyes. They sit in stillness, letting the world fade away for a moment. Trying to find it. Trying to feel it – the space inside their chest.

*[pause]*

A moment later, Hugo blinks his eyes open and shifts nervously in his seat. His forehead tight, eyebrows drawn together, jaw clenched.

**Hugo** *[annoyed]* I can't do this. This is too weird.

**Driver** Why? What happened?

**Hugo** My head just keeps jumping all over the place.

**Driver** That's normal. Our mind is doing it all the time, but usually we just don't realise it. Wait a second... I think I've got something that might help. Somewhere around here... I should have a CD with a little journey that helps me a lot.

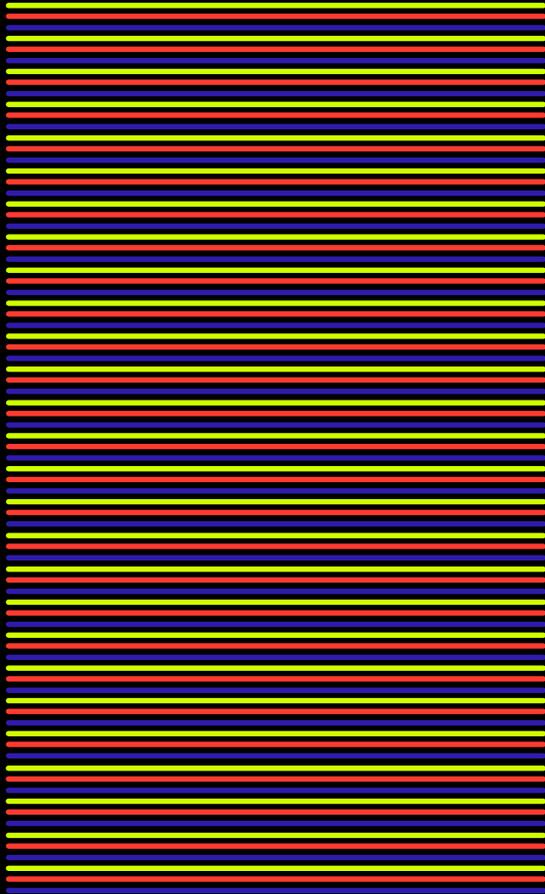
Cora and Hugo sink back into their seats, watching as the bus driver digs through a stack of old CDs – some scratched, some without cases. They look at each other – still puzzled. Hugo leans slightly toward Cora, lowering his voice so the bus driver won't hear.

**Hugo** *[whispering]* What is going on here?

**Cora** *[whispering]* No clue. I guess it's just another story.

The bus driver finally finds what he was looking for and slides the CD into the player. With the press of a button, the soft static of the radio fades and the journey begins.

*What are you waiting for?*



# Scanning

I invite you to take a moment for yourself

Just be here as you are

Notice the weight in your legs

Feel the contact with the ground

Your breath moves in and out  
It happens on its own  
You don't have to do anything

Your belly follows your breath

Expanding with the inhale

Returning with the exhale

You might notice a quiet rhythm  
Inside your chest

Across your shoulders, tension fades  
Your arms hang with their own weight  
Your hands soften

Small shifts appear in your neck

Tiny stretches

Subtle rotations

Feel how your jaw loosens

How your tongue relaxes

Softness spreads across your face

Around the eyes

Through the cheeks

And along the forehead

*What makes you shine?*



# Stars

There's a billion answers to why

There's a billion reasons to cry

There's a billion clues in the sky

So pick one and take it home with you

Pick one and make it your own

There's a billion thoughts flying high  
There's a billion ways of goodbye  
There's a billion tears we could dry

So pick one and take it home with you  
Pick one and come back home

There's a billion days that pass by  
So stop – turn around and fly

Let the stars tell you  
What you're here to do  
And then trust that  
It's the right thing for you

Let the stars show you  
The path that leads you through  
And then walk like  
It's the only way for you

There's a billion rules to defy  
There's a billion parts to untie  
There's a billion smiles in your eye

So pick one and take it home with you

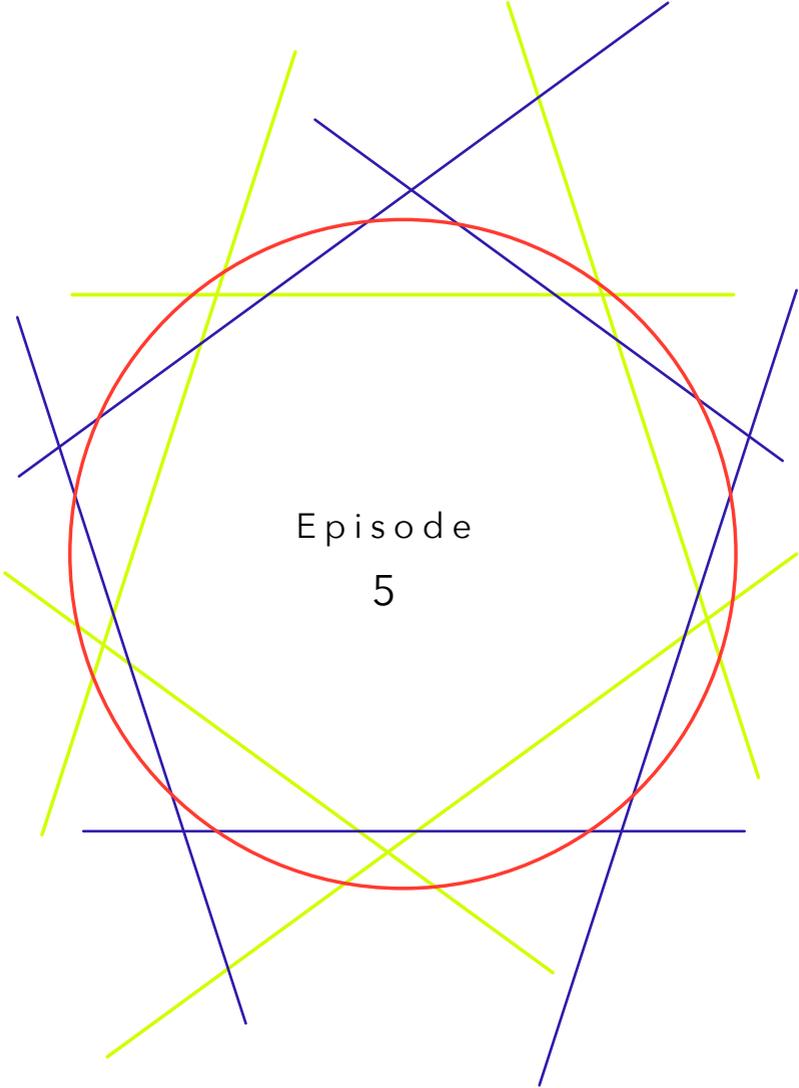
Pick one – you're not alone

There's a billion laws to comply  
But pause and start to shine

Let the stars tell you  
What you're here to do  
And then trust that  
It's the right thing for you

Let the stars show you  
The path that leads you through  
And then walk like  
It's the only way for you

S T A R S



Episode  
5

## Episode 5

**Driver** *[slightly laughing]* Welcome back!

Cora and Hugo blink. Their eyes take a moment to adjust to the dim light. Everything feels off – like waking up somewhere you don't quite remember falling asleep. Cora shifts upright, stretching her neck. Hugo rubs his face with both hands, pulling himself back into the present. They look around with eyes half open – the bus is completely empty.

**Hugo** What happened?

**Driver** Well, you fell asleep.

**Hugo** Really?

**Driver** Yep. Happens when you're not used to look inside.

**Cora** *[annoyed]* Ugh. No way... I really tried to do it right.

**Driver** Don't worry, you will figure it out – there's no rush.

**Hugo** So... what now?

**Driver** *[amused]* What now? Now you get off the bus.

We reached the final stop and I'm done for today.

Cora and Hugo glance surprised at each other, then back at him. The driver laughs, turns away and starts to clean up. He bends down, picking up an empty bottle from the floor. He tosses it into a bag already half full with crumpled coffee cups, greasy plastic boxes and other leftovers from the journey. He shakes his head, wondering why people always leave their mess for someone else to clean up.

The two travellers, still sluggish, sling their backpacks over their shoulders and move toward the exit. As they step down onto solid ground, the warm summer air embraces them. Above, a dark curtain of sky scattered with bright dots. In the distance, a mountain peak looms, reaching as if to touch the stars. For a moment, Cora and Hugo just stand still, gazes lifted, listening to the bus driver rattling through the trash in the background.

**Hugo** This is all a bit strange.

**Cora** What do you mean?

**Hugo** I don't know. Not sure what to think anymore.

**Cora** Maybe it will all make more sense later.

**Hugo** Maybe.

**Cora** So... where are you heading now?

**Hugo** There's a campsite not far from here – I'll stay there for the night. What about you?

**Cora** Don't know, maybe I join.

The rattling of the bag comes closer. The driver passes them and tosses the trash into a container, seemingly relieved to be rid of the leftovers. On the way back to the bus he stops next to them, tilts his head back and lets a long breath escape. For a moment the three of them just stare into the distant dark.

*[pause]*

**Cora** It's so calming to see this.

**Hugo** *[surprised]* Really? For me it's strange.

**Cora** Why?

**Hugo** There are so many questions – and most of them we can't answer. We know so little about everything that's out there, you know? It's so weird.

**Cora** Hm.

**Driver** But isn't that the whole mystery?

**Hugo** What do you mean?

**Driver** It's not like you need answers to all questions.

**Hugo** But I want to understand how it all works. Otherwise, what's the point?

**Driver** Maybe there is no point.

**Hugo** What? What's the point if there is no point? That doesn't make sense.

**Driver** Maybe you just have to choose what the point is.

**Hugo** That's... confusing.

**Driver** Why?

**Hugo** I don't even know the options to choose from.

**Driver** So you need to know more in order to make a decision?

**Hugo** *[confused]* I guess so.

**Driver** *[joking]* Well, then just wait for the moment when you know everything to choose something.

**Hugo** Yeah... that sounds good.

**Driver** Oh come on, you're already deciding all the time. You chose to go on this journey, to take this bus, to get off at this stop. Okay no, maybe you didn't choose to get off here – you fell asleep and I kicked you out. But anyway, right now you're choosing to stand here, stare into the sky, and listen to my voice.

**Hugo** Actually I wanted to get off here.

**Driver** Well, lucky you. The point is – every moment is a decision. If you don't like it, choose something else.

**Hugo** But I don't know what to choose.

**Driver** Well, what lights you up? What are you excited about? What brings you joy? It's okay if you don't know it right away. Most of us spend years running after what we think we should choose and forget to listen to what is actually right for us. The trick isn't to figure it out with your head, it's to listen to your body. You can feel the difference – when something is right, it pulls you gently forward and gives you energy. When it's wrong, you shrink smaller. Follow the pull, even if it's small. That's where your life wants you to move.

**Hugo** Hm.

*[small pause]*

**Driver** Check out the stars. They don't try to be anything other than what they are. They simply shine – maybe that is the point.

**Cora** What? To shine?

**Driver** Yeah.

**Hugo** But how do you shine?

**Driver** You tell me what makes you shine.

**Hugo** [*hesitant*] Well, I think...

**Driver** [*interrupting*] Stop thinking about it. Stop trying to figure it out with your head. Just notice, you already know – maybe you just don't remember.

**Cora** But I still feel like there are these old stories that hold me back and stop me from following what excites me.

**Driver** Then notice that.

**Hugo** Notice it? I don't get what you mean.

**Driver** Alright. Imagine your life was a book.

You're reading it – sentence after sentence, page after page, chapter after chapter. You're the main character it's about, but sometimes you get stuck in one chapter, repeating it over and over instead of moving on. You experience what's written – every fear, every doubt. You get so involved in the story that you forget you're actually holding the book in your hands. Because you're not just the character living it – you're also the one reading. And when you zoom out and start observing the story instead of living it, you begin to notice the patterns – the same stories showing up in new settings, the side characters who keep returning, the endings that keep looping. And when you start to see that, something shifts. You might realise you don't have to keep reading the same pages over and over – you can always start a new chapter. Maybe this is getting a little weird for your brain, but just imagine you're not only the character and the reader, but you're the author as well – writing it as you go. At any moment, you can flip the page, start a new chapter, write a different version or create a whole different story.

**Cora** You say it as if it was easy.

**Driver** I'm not saying it's easy. It takes a while to zoom out and see that you're not just a character playing a role. Once you see that you're also the reader and the author of your story, you stop being trapped inside.

**Cora** And then?

**Driver** Then you're free – free to keep reading, to change the story or to write something new. It seems like we have been repeating the same chapters long enough by now – maybe it's time to move on.

**Cora** But how do we move on?

**Driver** Sometimes the best thing is to close the book – to enjoy the silence between the words. Listen – you will start to hear how the story wants to continue.

**Hugo** But I always end up thinking about something.

**Driver** That's okay. Just come back to listening – again and again.

**Hugo** *[sarcastic]* Oh great. That's not what I wanted to hear.

**Driver** Then don't. You can keep repeating the old chapters if you prefer.

**Cora** I don't want that anymore.

**Driver** Then continue... and ask yourself this question:

*If my life was a book, and people had been reading it the whole time – what would they be whispering to the pages, wishing I would finally do?*

He doesn't wait for an answer. He turns, walks back and steps into the bus. The engine hums, doors hiss shut. One hand gives them a wave, the other steers the wheel – the bus rolls away from the station. Cora and Hugo stand in silence on warm asphalt watching it vanish into the night.

Still puzzled by everything that just happened, they slowly start walking toward the campsite.

*Exit and Continue?*



# Exit

What is a story

What are the stories I tell myself

About myself

And which of them do I believe

Mental constructions  
Projected onto the world  
Forming identity

A fragile feeling of safety  
Keeping me locked in a mental prison  
Holding me back from adventure

Living the story  
Day after day  
Controlling my actions

How I think  
How I feel  
How I act

How strange to follow a script  
Hidden in the unconscious  
Buried under distraction

Blaming the past  
Holding on to it  
Keeping what is long gone

Stories tell me who I am

They let me hide

And make me feel safe

But who is behind

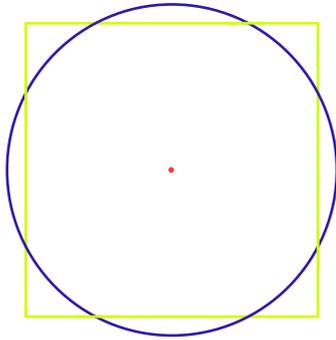
All stories I tell myself

About myself

The ones I believe in so deeply

And what if I told the story

A little different



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