

I should be sleeping, but I can't right now. And it's not because I'm obsessed with perfectly recreating that last time down to the very last detail which includes me not sleeping and making a recording for you instead. It's more like, the weight of this idea is finally hitting me. I kept thinking I should not entertain flights of fancy, but that's not what this is anymore. It's a more literal flight, or other form of travel, to the place where something bad could have happened to me. Maybe did. I don't know. Brains do weird things in response to trauma, right? As terrible as that is to say, that seems to make more sense than the actual turn of events I remember simply because there's no mystical element involved.

Ultimately, what I should be asking myself right now is what I'm hoping to get from this. Isn't that the sort of 'golden rule' when it comes to decision making or acting in the moment. 'What am I going to get from this?' Not to be confused with THE Golden Rule 'Do unto others as you'd have done to you.' But they actually aren't that distinct in my mind. I don't think we ever talk about it, but the benefit of THE Golden Rule is that you establish a social order in which you are not mistreated. Pretty big perk if you ask me. Pretty all encompassing perk.

And also that comes up in conflict resolution meetings. 'What are you hoping the takeaway of this is going to be?' 'What do you think our action plan should be at the end?' And even with the lawsuit after the accident, the matter of 'what do you want from this?' was there. During one of the few meetings I had with my attorney, he did ask me what I think I was owed considering the permanent damage to my hip. But even then I struggled to have an answer, and I just pretended it was because I had never really thought about accident settlements. He was the expert; he needed to figure that out.

But really, I can't help it. I tend to think in the most general terms possible when faced with that specific question in any or all of its many forms. And maybe that makes sense. But I'm saying that because you tend to give me the benefit of the doubt. Maybe that makes sense to you, but I am not so kind to myself, and I don't think that makes sense. See, the problem is scope and a mismatched pairing of such. I should be thinking of more immediate gratification. And that should be easy. In fact, for some people, that's their default, and they do it way too much. But I've never really heard about the opposite problem. That's the thing I have. And to never hear about it is an incredibly isolating experience. Or not experience. More of a doubling down on the issues I've already had. And maybe there's some level of self-reflection or personal growth that could change that. But it's not going to happen in the... maybe six hours before we head out. Certainly not when I'm this tired.

What's the magic word here? Closure? Is that what I want? Maybe I want to be able to say with absolute certainty that I did not see a mountain goddess or whatever. But even if I don't see anything this trip, what does that really prove? It doesn't disprove what happened before, even if it serves as evidence against it. These are two separate events, for better or likely worse because I understand the skeptics' drive to simplify this relationship: to argue that the latter experience of nothing disproves the claims that came before. Because from that comes the only chance we have of really knowing. I just don't think that should apply here.

Nothing can change how I remember what happened. The memory is so vivid. Her face, her voice, the way her hair was dancing with the slight breeze: it was all so real. It blended into the world around me. I was pretty sure the world around me was

real. Like I said, I don't remember blacking out or anything like that. I don't remember some grand shift or anything that felt unnatural. There was just an urge to walk and a woman waiting for me at the end of whatever path I took. I don't even know which path. My uncle thinks he can remember where it was I went missing. But he doesn't remember a path being there ,and even his word isn't a guarantee.

So I can't replicate what happened. I can't get any definitive answers even if I could. I want to finish that conversation, sure, but I'm hesitant to call that the end of things. Or not the end of things, I mean. What's the end goal in having that conversation? It's not exactly something I can carry with me, and even though you've been incredibly kind about it, I know you have trouble believing me when I describe it or when I say it. And you are concerned that I seem to be entertaining the idea, but you are just more concerned about me overall and want to help me through this. And if that means agreeing with me for a short while at least in spirit, you're willing to do that. And I appreciate that.

(Sigh) But for you to actually help me, I need to be able to point out a goal. Explaining what exactly I need from you or how it is you can help me would also be great. But that stems from the ultimate goal. And like I said I don't have a goal nor am I good at finding it.

There are thought exercises that get at it, though, right? Like, a magic wand. If I had a magic wand, I would want... Um... I don't know what I would want. Ultimately, I would want to have... You're expecting me to say an uninjured hip, right? That's what I would be expected to want. And yeah, the pain sucks. I can't pretend that it doesn't. That's kind of beyond debate. I mean, the evolutionary function of pain is to make us

stop doing things, so it has to make a very compelling argument. But you know what, that's not on the top of my priority list. Maybe it should be, but it isn't. Or not directly, anyway.

Really, I just want a place in the world to call my own. Figuratively speaking, owning a home isn't exactly what I mean. (Pause) I just want to know without any doubts that I belong in a certain space. And not just somewhere otherwise unspecified either. Because that's a fun little thought exercise, but I want to know that I truthfully belong in a place that I can point to and go back to at any time. I don't think I've really had that. Just the assumption that I was going to get there, someday.

In that figurative place, I wouldn't have to fight to be heard or fight against my hip because that place wouldn't be so incompatible with my current state. It couldn't leave me out because it was mine. I had the figurative key, so I could rest there and not be so exhausted all the time, you know. I could just... be there.

Ultimately, that's what I want. Which doesn't fully seem possible, right? I get it. It's... complicated. I know. This is really the sort of thing that would actually require a magic wand. Nothing short of that would work. Because it is a lot to do, I know. I wanted to believe it was possible while I was living my life before the accident, but in the back of my mind, I knew I couldn't guarantee it.

Even if this goddess is real, though, I don't know how she could give me that. I mean, she'd have to offer a little hut up there on the mountain with her, right? That was part of the stories I read about her. But I don't know if I could accept that. I don't know if I could be away from other people, from my family--good and bad. Dangerous thought, I know. All the dysfunction and the issues surrounding it are terrible. I won't deny that, but

I still tell myself we can work through it. My family means well; they just don't always do well. Habits may be hard to break, but you know, it happens.

But maybe I should be keeping a more realistic approach to everything. Maybe I should be more... Not cynical but ready to disengage when need be. But what do I know, though.

*(Pause. Music fades in)*

The Mountain's Heart is a production of Hugot Podcasting. And this end song comes from the Sounds like an Earful music supply. See you in two weeks.