

## **The Dreamer vs. The Pragmatist**

by Lauren Fish

It had been a spectacular night. The kind that only seems to exist in movies. He walked me out to my car and we continued talking. It was a balmy summer evening with a sky full of stars above us. This is the part of the movie where the boy leans over and kisses the girl and the fireworks go off and the music plays. But this was not a movie. All I wanted to do was grab his head and kiss him. He was right there. The perfect moment of the fairytale was beckoning. But I was paralyzed. I had been waiting for this moment for years and the expectation was crushing me. Every negative outcome of what could go wrong was strangling me. Anyone else and I could've done it. But not him. Instead, I just fiddled with my keys and gave him an awkward hug. The car door slammed and I drove away.

I did not want to face the Berzerker at King's Dominion. My friends had other ideas. Rachael dragged me by the arm as I dug my heels into the ground. I hated thrill rides. I did not want to think about what could go wrong on this 50-foot tall metal contraption. 10 am in the morning and my inhibitions were high. But I didn't have time to analyze because Rachael and Andi pushed me on the ride. As soon as we started moving, I couldn't think about anything else. The boat started swaying back and forth just fast enough to make my gut rise into my neck. And then the ride fell and my gut fell all the way down to my ankles. Things really got crazy once the ship started flying upside down. The screams were Earth shattering. The bubblegum that Rachael was chewing started to fall out of her mouth. She laughed as she grabbed it before it caught in her hair. It was terrifying, it was fast, but it was a blast. And I survived. I'm ok.

I am sitting in my history class silently wanting to go on a trip that my teacher is announcing. It's a two-week exchange trip to Japan in the summer. The pragmatist in me comments *that's not for you. You wouldn't do that. You've never even been out of the country. That kind of trip is too much for you. Something will definitely go wrong.* I forget the trip until Andi mentions it to me in the hallway. She reveals that she wants to go. And just like that, the risk becomes much smaller. Suddenly, the pragmatic mind is gone and it seems totally plausible to consider Japan as an option. Having her beside me makes the problems shrink to almost nothing. It's not that I don't have my own wants and dreams, it's that I don't know how to achieve them. Or I don't think they are worth my attention.

Do dreams need validation by others to become a reality?

When I ask myself this question, the pragmatist always

Wins.

Tears were streaming down my face.

Big, hot, angry tears rolled around my nose and onto my neck.

I drove down the empty highway pissed at myself. The music was blasting with fuck you songs that I directed at him. And myself. *I am such an idiot. Why do I let moments pass me by?* I replay every minute of the night, analyzing every thing I did wrong. The proximity on the couch. His hand brushing mine in the doorway. The smell of his cologne as I hugged him goodbye. I look at every moment and see a missed opportunity to make a move. But the irrational fear trapped me from doing what I actually wanted to do.

It was not enough. I was not enough. I had wasted the night away.

I couldn't believe I was in Tokyo. It kept hitting me how I was thousands of miles away from home. Everything was moving so fast. The language sounded like music I'd never heard and even though I had no idea what they were saying, I was enthralled. My host mom sped down the road and we stopped at a restaurant. The conversation was mostly small talk and occasionally Aina and her mom would break off and talk in Japanese. I was nervous, but Aina and her mom were so warm and welcoming so my anxiety wasn't around.

New Years Eve, 2010.

7 pm and my whole family is preparing for our annual party with all of our closest friends. My mom is finishing up the appetizers and she asks me to arrange the vegetable plate. I lay out the carrots and the celery and the cucumbers in concentric circles. My dad is grilling his famous wings and my brothers and sister are finishing tidying up the basement. Everyone is counting down until the guests start arriving at 8 pm. But I am the most excited out of anyone. It is my favorite holiday because I *love* this party. Because he is there. I am fourteen years old and I have the biggest crush on a guy I've known my whole life. As the guests begin to arrive, I anxiously wait for his white minivan to pull up to our driveway. Then the doorbell rings and I hear my mom greet his family. As he walks into the kitchen, my cousin and I play it cool by relaxing near the bowl of Doritos. We casually say hi while still maintaining our space. Then we all head downstairs to where the kid party is. We flirt by playing Ping-Pong, getting competitive and laughing the night away. Before I know it we're toasting with ginger ale at midnight. Every year I imagine that he'll kiss me when the ball drops, but so far, nothing has happened. I've dreamed about that moment for years, but I would never have the courage to initiate something.

*You will get hurt.*

*It is safer to assume that he wants nothing to do with you.*

*I don't care if he talks to you and spends time with you, it means nothing.*

*The risk is not worth taking. Just keep things the way they are. Don't push it.*

*You will get hurt.*

Your palms are sweating as you hold the phone in your hand. You have just called Andi for a pep talk to help you through this. You finally feel ready to make the move. You dial his number. You hear the ring. You hear his voice. You are pacing around your childhood bedroom with the spring green walls and the trophies on the shelves. After awkward small talk, you ask him if he wants to start dating. He says yes. Your heart soars and you can't feel your feet on the ground. You somehow civilly end the conversation.

Tears are streaming down your face.

Big, hot, joyous tears roll around your nose and onto your neck.

You start jumping and screaming and crying and shouting and dancing and laughing. You are all happiness and all you had to do was take the leap. The world seems full of promise and no one can be happier than you in that moment.

Your palms are sweating as you hold the phone in your hand. You know you are going to call Andi after to help you through this. You feel like you can't move. He dialed the number. He heard the ring. He hears your voice. You are pacing around your childhood bedroom with the spring green walls and the trophies on the shelves. After awkward small talk, he says he wants to break up and just be friends. You say ok. Your heart drops and you can't feel your feet on the ground. You somehow civilly end the conversation.

Tears are streaming down your face.

Big, hot, miserable tears roll around your nose and onto your neck.

You start shaking and screaming and crying and sobbing and falling and stop breathing. You are despondent. The world seems empty and no one can be unhappier than you in that moment.

We climb into the coaster car. I pull the hot seat belt bars over my head and fasten them into place. The operator runs down the line and checks our buckles to make sure we don't fall out and plummet to our deaths. But I try not to think about that now. I try not to focus on my heart beating so fast that it might power the roller coaster. It takes every fiber in my being not to jump out of the car and leave the ride. Before I know it, we speed up the 450 feet tall hill. And then I fall and I am free. I grab Andi's hand and we soar. Exhilarating tears are flying out of my eyes from the wind. I can't help but scream with a huge smile on my face. And all my apprehension is left behind at 75 mph.

