

Blue Light Meditation Glasses

Rachel finished her fifth straight episode of *Parks and Recreation*, forced the television set off, removed her blue light glasses and heaved herself into bed at her scheduled 10:30 pm bedtime. She scratched ticks off the resolutions checklist in her Happiness Journal, proving to herself that the day was well spent. She swallowed a melatonin with a gulp of water. She turned the lamp off and the room became pitch black like the magazine recommended; she'd bought special blinds that defended against all outside light. She plugged her phone in and put it on do-not-disturb-mode. Falling asleep was hard enough; she didn't want a phone call waking her up once she'd finally passed out. Next, she slithered her tongue in behind her upper front teeth and whooshed all the air out of her lungs, closed her mouth and inhaled through her nose for four seconds. She held her breath for seven seconds, but felt the red light of the alarm clock jabbing at her closed eyelids, so she turned it away from her. She started her therapist's breathing process over again and her heartbeat slowed, but her mind pulled out of its garage and raced around the tracks of her day.

Rachel went over the day's activities. After partaking in her mandatory morning meditation, she'd slogged around town running errands; she bought groceries, went to the car wash and bought self-help books at the used bookstore. At home, she'd meticulously folded all her clothes and cleaned her apartment until her whole life was structured in a fine, well-designed order. She'd even withheld from indulging in a nap. While she enjoyed a good nap, she knew it would make it nearly impossible to fall asleep at night if she wasn't completely pooped. She was doing everything right. She thought she'd almost fallen asleep, but then she'd had a nagging itch in her back and she just had to scratch it. And then she was more awake, and she knew it would take a while to sink back to the edge of sleep. One itch led to the next and she wriggled around in bed

maneuvering herself, never comfortable enough to relax for even a second, always repositioning an arm or a leg or turning over the bamboo memory-foam pillow to the cool side. It didn't make sense; her body should be tired by not having napped and from her exercising during the day and not eating any sugar close to bedtime. She'd attended the hot yoga class after the therapist appointment and both activities had exhausted her. Afterwards, she'd meticulously cleaned her apartment. She'd tried to read her hopeful Pinker book about how the world was getting better and better, but had to put it down after reading and rereading the same line over and over again without having the mental bandwidth to comprehend it. So, she partook in her *Parks and Recreation* marathon, but told herself it was a necessary diversion after undertaking the day's arduous social activities that strained her as an introvert. Besides, she'd even stretched and done a few sit-ups while watching the show. It had taken a toll on Rachel extending herself and trying to break into the women in the hot yoga class's well-established social circle. They were full of pep and camaraderie and it was hard for Rachel to keep up. Stretching her torso in bed, she felt her tired and sore abs beneath the couple of pounds of extra weight she was hoping to shed. She smiled at the thought of the Thai food she'd eaten for dinner. It was a little heavy, but she'd used it as a reward to incentivize herself to go to therapy.

Rachel yanked on her mind's parking brake and squeezed her eyes shut. She started counting the sheep in their pasture in the sky and they played with each other and followed each other off rainbow cliffs and fell laughing into the pillows of the clouds and they jumped up and down and frolicked with each other.

But then the sheep left their joyous weekend pastures and put on scrubs and headed off to work. Rachel dreaded having to wake up and head off to the hospital. She had yet to meet a friendly nurse, and the doctors didn't even look at her as they issued her orders. The surgeons were the

worst, but the other nurses weren't far behind. She'd thought that hospitals were supposed to be friendly, with the medical staff teaming up with the patients to fight that shared, tenacious enemy of disease that attacked the human body. But it wasn't like that, not at all. But—enough of that. No negative thoughts. No, no thoughts at all. Just sleep. Rachel took a deep breath and held it and counted to seven. Or was she supposed to hold it for eight seconds? Rachel wasn't sure, but she did know if she didn't get enough sleep, she'd be miserable all the next day and she wouldn't have the strength to put up with the bellyaching of the patients and would start to snipe at them. It was time to get serious and fall asleep. The room was silent, extraordinarily silent. She realized she'd forgotten to turn her fan on for the white noise that helped her drown out her thoughts. She got up and put it on and clambered back into bed. She closed her eyes and listened to the fan's peaceful whirr and pictured herself at the beach, feeling the lull of the waves going in and out, in and out, smoothly and calmly and everlastingly, safe in their constancy.

Rachel saw her grandparents lounging beneath umbrellas and her little cousins building intricate sandcastles with moats and outer walls and inner walls, while Rachel was at a beachside happy hour with her sisters, who introduced her to a handsome man wearing an open button-down shirt. He looked like Dr. Gold from oncology. It was nice seeing him out of his severe lab coat and glasses. They drank and laughed together, and they watched the sun set over the ocean.

It was a nice image, but it didn't help her fall asleep at all. If anything, it only aroused a deep desire within her.

She shook her head and turned to pick up her phone to put on a guided sleep meditation. However, she got sidetracked from putting on the guided sleep meditation when she saw some texts in the college group chat she shared with her sorority sisters. She opened up the messaging app and devoured the messages she'd missed. The conversation was about a friend's impending

move to Charlotte with her boyfriend. Rachel chimed to tell her how happy she was for them and felt gladdened when her friend sent her a heart emoji in response. She was too tired to keep sending messages, but she enjoyed reading her friends' banter as they talked about their new jobs in various cities around the country. It seemed like they were doing well and were making friends and Rachel was glad for them. She really was glad for them and wanted to tell them, but she felt really wiped from the day and trying so hard to fall asleep and couldn't muster the energy to tell them that she was happy for them. But it was nice that they were making friends and were happy. Rachel smiled and remembered the good times they'd had together during college.

She remembered how great it was living in a big house together with all her friends, staying up late, passing around joints, and playing board games, talking about biology and philosophy and boys, and their dream to open a café together. And she remembered studying together and drinking together and going for long walks under the moonlight together and so many other things.

But she didn't remember having trouble trying to sleep while she was living with her sorority sisters. She finally closed the chat and turned the guided meditation app on and put her phone down. She realized she hadn't even put on her blue light glasses when using her phone and knew it would be hard to fall asleep after all that dangerous blue light had seeped through her eyes deep into the crevices of her skull. The woman leading the guided meditation, who had a calming British accent, told her to let her body sink into the bed and release her weight and release all of the burdens she was carrying unnecessarily, like a yoke on a mule. She had to cast it all off and she'd run around easy and free. The woman told her to release it from her shoulders, her neck, her arms, her legs. She wasn't an animal from the old times who was abused and laden down with heavy weights; she was a human being and she was living a good life and was trying to help people as a nurse and she should be without weight and she deserved to have a nice, peaceful sleep. The

British woman told Rachel to feel the sleepy sinking sensations in the exhalations in her breath and Rachel tried her best to follow the leader's instructions.

Roots crept down from her joints and anchored into the floor, branching deep past the topsoil to link up with the roots of the universe. She held hands with the universe and saw herself giving small, thoughtful gifts to her fellow nurses and holding crying children after their mothers had died, helping them to be strong, encouraging them that life would get better, the world would make it up to them, there were other people out there who would nurture them.

The guided meditation ended, and Rachel smiled and felt lighter, but she was still awake. She pulled her alarm clock to her and saw that it was already 1:08 am. She wished she could sleep outside for a week like one of the outdoorsy physician's assistants recommended her to do. By going to sleep when it got dark and waking up with the sunrise, she'd get her circadian rhythm back on track. But she could never take the time off after just recently starting her job at the hospital. The fan's buzz brought her thoughts back and Rachel remembered that the fan was really the waves and the waves were at the beach. And the beach meant grandma. From out of a fog, she remembered one time when she had visited her grandma in Manhattan when she was young. She couldn't fall asleep because of the city's ceaseless sirens and honking cars. Her grandma had her take a scalding hot shower to fall asleep. Rachel wrenched herself out of bed and showered and dried herself off and plopped into bed and felt her body cooling down readying itself for sleep and she felt her chest easily rise and fall up and down, up and down, and before she could remember any other doctor recommended steps to help her fall asleep...

... she must have fallen asleep. It was 5:41 am and she was awake even though she didn't have to wake up until 6:34 am and leave to the hospital at 7:48 am, and she diddled around on her phone scrolling for an hour through friend's pictures and various news stories before rushing

through meditation and yoga and breakfast and she guzzled a cup of coffee and then another and hurried off to do traffic meditation and get to work, where she hoped she would have a good and tiring day, so it would be easier to fall asleep that night.