

## Perception

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The air vibrated as the universal strings were played; the bow drew forward and back across the sky. Nathan and Vivian sat beneath the cosmic symphony, as the rise and fall of the world's notes brought color to their emotions.

Vivian sat on a low stool surrounded by a perfect patch of grass; her eyes were fixed on the gently swaying trees, dancing to the sound. Nathan sat a few feet away reading a book about twentieth-century European history—he was delving deep into the fallibilities of mankind—but half-way through a chapter on WWII, the ink began to appear red as if blood were pouring from the page. He blamed it on the brightness of the sun, though he set the book aside.

He felt a trickle of perspiration slide down the back of his neck, beginning from the line of his sandy hair. "I'm thankful for the breeze or else this heat wouldn't be bearable," he said.

Vivian, lost in thoughts of dancing trees and the swell of her emotions, wondered what could be unbearable about the glory of a September day still clinging to the last rays of the summer sun. She opened her mouth, then closed it and sighed.

Nathan watched her body rise and fall; he perceived the words lost in her slow exhale, and then he too glanced away. After ten years together, he knew that she had entered a place that he could not access. He sometimes wished that he could reach inside and grasp the secrets as they bloomed, but such attempts caused Vivian to retreat even deeper within her mind. Early in their marriage, he had made an unspoken promise that he would never search for the keys to that inner chamber, though he often fantasized about its contents. When Vivian grew sullen, he saw her sitting within a dim cave; when her emotions peaked, she was running along a beach, always one step from being swept up in the waves. Such images allowed him to cope with the mercurial nature of her emotions.

He wished to speak to her, yet he knew to keep his distance. He

reached for words and plucked them from the pages of his reading, in hopes of establishing common ground. “This is such a peaceful place—it’s difficult to imagine that soldiers marched across this field in WWI. You should read this book when I’m finished. It’s important to remember the dark history of mankind.”

His words entered Vivian’s mind like an assault. Why corrupt the glorious afternoon with musings about tragedy? We’re a thousand miles apart, Vivian concluded. He’s thinking about events in history; I’m watching the blades of grass flicker in the wind. He’s grounded in facts... Oh, but I’d rather reach for beauty and life! He probably thinks that I’m ridiculous. Her back stiffened at the thought.

Nathan shifted in his seat—he’d said the wrong thing. She found him callous. She disliked his talk of death and destruction.

A change in the wind became perceptible as silence settled over the pair. Each felt rebuked. They turned inward for self-preservation. They chastised themselves for their disparate natures—for the blaring flaws that they perceived in themselves—thus as the wind built, they were even more attuned to the sound. A few clouds began to creep across the expanse above bringing a chance of rain.

Nathan stood to stretch his legs. “I think I’ll go for a walk in case a storm is moving in,” he said, breaking the silence at last.

“Perhaps it won’t rain,” Vivian replied. There I go contradicting him. Why can’t I leave him with his opinions?

“I’d rather walk now and not risk the chance of missing the opportunity.”

He was being practical, as usual. She thought of joining him, but didn’t wish to intrude. “Enjoy your walk.”

Should I ask her to go with me? Oh, but she finds me boring and predictable. To hell with it, take a chance, he commanded. “Would you like to go?”

“Yes, I’d like that,” she replied.

“It might start to rain before we return,” he added.

“Maybe, though I wouldn’t mind.”

“You know, neither would I.”

Vivian felt herself unfurling, once again opening herself to Nathan



and the world. “Imagine us running together in the rain. We’d be a ridiculous sight—you with your glasses covered in drops, and me splashing through puddles in sandals and a summer dress. Passing drivers would get a laugh.”

“They certainly would. But you’re right. It might not rain.”

Vivian smiled at his newfound optimism and conceded, “There’s no way of knowing.”

As they walked away, each reached for the other’s hand instinctively. They remembered running in the rain as children, free of inhibitions and self-criticism. Secretly, they both hoped that it would rain.