

SEA OF BECOMING:

A Zen Encounter Filtering Out All Non-Essentials

In a stark, minimalist garden, four friends stood in contemplative silence, surrounded by the serene beauty of a single, perfectly smooth black stone resting atop a bed of meticulously raked, white sand. The air was still, heavy with anticipation, broken only by the distant chime of a wind bell, its gentle tinkling weaving through the bamboo fence that enclosed this oasis.

Noel stepped forward, his sandals whispering against the smooth wooden walkway, each step echoing the stillness that enveloped them. He stopped at the edge of the sand, his breath deep with awe. "Look at it," he murmured, his voice a reverent hush. "It's breathtaking! This stone isn't just sitting there—it's breathing! Can't you feel it?" He turned to the others, his eyes full of fervor, as if he were sharing a secret of the universe. "It's like the entirety of existence has been compacted into this one impossibly small space. Can you sense that? We're standing at the edge of being and non-being!"

Orathip remained rooted, folding her arms across her chest, and eyes narrowing as if surveying a tired cliché. She scoffed, "I feel like someone spent way too much time with that rake, Noel. You're seeing 'the universe' because that's what the brochure told you to see. It's just a rock on dirt! If we were at a construction site, you'd call it a tripping hazard. Why does it suddenly become 'enlightenment' just because someone hung a sign that says 'Zen Garden' and charged admission?"

Gwen shifted her weight and checked her watch, the soft click of its button sounding almost scandalously loud in the quiet. She stifled a yawn, her eyes watering slightly from the effort. As her shoes scraped softly against the gravel path, she added, "Honestly? I don't see what the big deal is. It's a rock. It's sand. It's quiet. Can we go get lunch now? My level of spiritual engagement is currently at zero, and I'm pretty sure the stone doesn't care whether I'm impressed or not."

Tara let out a low, rolling laugh that rippled across the sand without disturbing a single grain of sand. She spread her arms wide as though presenting the garden to an invisible audience, her bracelets jingling softly—another small transgression against the silence. "Oh, Gwen, you're missing the profound irony of it all! Don't you see? We've traveled a cross the city to pay a tidy sum to stare at a pebble and realize that 'nothing' is 'everything.' It's an ultimate cosmic joke." She threw her head back, grinning at the sky. "We've found another expensive possible way to realize we've got absolutely nothing to say." She then bowed slightly toward the stone. "Thank you, wise stone, for this invaluable lesson in emptiness," she murmured, her voice dripping with playful mockery. "My wallet is lighter, my mind is blank, and the universe remains utterly indifferent. Truly, we have arrived!"

The wind bell chimed once more, distant and clear, as the four stood in their varied states of wonder, skepticism, boredom, and amusement—each projecting their own meaning onto the silence, the stone, and the perfectly raked sand that cradled nothing but air and sky.

— T Newfields

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