

Losing Myself in the Park

[TAPE]: [Ambi from Sheep's Meadow, keeps rolling under the intro.](#)

David Newtown: There's a rolling hill in Central Park named Sheep's Meadow. Google describes it as a "scenic Central Park lounging lawn." It is the last place I would want to work out. Out there, where all the frisbee players, dog owners, and loungers can see me? No thanks. So why am I standing in the middle of the park, holding a towel, getting ready to twist my body into whatever contortions yoga demands of me?

[TAPE]: ["Elevator Time" by Lee Feldman starts playing.](#)

I'm David Newtown, and this is *Onomatopoeia* — a podcast about the people and places of New York City. In this episode, losing myself in the park.

Ever since I came to New York for college, I've avoided working out.

[TAPE]: ["Elevator Time" cuts out.](#)

Gyms, with their close quarters and other people, were terrible. Instead, I started exploring the city. That was enough to keep my weight steady. Sure, I gained the freshman 15. But I was honestly comfortable with that. If I kept walking, I didn't need to worry.

[TAPE]: ["JoDon" from blue dot sessions starts playing.](#)

But once the pandemic started, I found myself in my apartment. Eternally.

Like everyone else - I stayed put.

Eating the same meals, day in, day out, under incandescent bulbs.

I would tell myself — get up, do something — anything.

[TAPE]: ["JoDon" cuts out.](#)

But the days kept melting together. Going to a gym wasn't enough of a shift. I needed to be outside, and I needed to get out of my head. So I signed up for Yoga in the Park and grabbed a towel.

SONIC SEPARATION - A BEAT.

[TAPE]: Ambi from Sheep's meadow starts.

We're told to meet at Le Pain Quotidien, on the north side of the Meadow. I'm one of the first people there.

New Yorkers bustle by, ignoring each other until it becomes important not to. The trees drop green-and-orange leaves in a chilly north wind. My hoodie isn't quite thick enough. As other yoga students gather, our instructor arrives. He's young. His name is Christian. He deputizes me to be in charge as he runs off to the bathroom. Me, with my not-wanting-to-be-there face. I think he knows.

I lay out my towel. I'm near the back of the group, so Christian's words are quiet. I can see his forms, though, so I do my best to copy them. I can hear the city behind the sounds of the park.

I shuck off my socks. The grass is damp and cool. The beginning forms start us off with our faces next to the ground. When I breathe in...

[TAPE]: *sniff* sound.

...I smell earth. The sun warms my back, and I quietly take off my jacket.

Christian leads us through the poses, adding a new form at the end of each cycle. Cobra pose, with an arched back. Downward dog. Kick the leg back, and rise. Lunge into Warrior 1. Warrior 2. Scoop the air and toss it to the sky. Reverse your arms, and stare at the sun. With each repeat, my face is back down, smelling grass and the damp earth.

Face the sun. Touch the ground and balance on your right hand and foot. Splay your limbs out.

[TAPE]: "JoDon" begins playing again.

I can't keep my balance. I can feel my hip complaining. It starts to burn, loose in the socket.

So I stop...

[TAPE]: "JoDon" cuts out.

...Take a drink, gather myself. Start the cycle again.

[TAPE]: Sheep's Meadow ambi starts.

Smell the earth. Touch the sky. See the sun. I balance this time, just for a second.

We finish with time for meditation. I'm sweaty. I try to ignore the growling in my stomach, the bead of water running from my forehead down to the tip of my nose. I try to ignore my bones, and my joints, and my body. But I'm more aware of myself than I've been for months. I decide to breathe.

[TAPE:] One large breath, in scene, in and out. Sheep's Meadow ambi stops.

SONIC SEPARATION - A BEAT

[TAPE]: "Elevator Time" starts.

This episode of *Onomatopoeia* was created by me, David Newtown. *Onomatopoeia* is a production of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. Joanne Faryon is our executive producer and professor. Original theme music by Lee Feldman. Other music by Blue Dot Sessions. Special thanks to Columbia Digital Librarian Michelle Wilson and my fellow classmate, Shannon Geary.