

*breathe • tulum*

a meditation on place.  
by Monet Hurst-Mendoza

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PRE-SHOW MUSIC: House/Jungle vibe as the audience enters. The music gives way to the prolonged ring of a Tibetan singing bowl, signaling the start of the play.

We begin in darkness over an empty playing space.

The sound of paced, controlled breathing breaks the silence. The lights begin to rise, very, very slowly. We make out figures on the ground. It is our COMPANY. They lie on their backs on, legs spread out comfortably, eyes closed. Some may have their hands on their stomachs, their hearts, whatever position is comfortable.

Their breathing joins together as one—rhythmic, ocean-like.

You belong here	ONE
Rest	TWO
Trust your instincts, follow your heart	THREE
Rejuvenate	TWO
Happiness is a day in Tulum	FOUR
Reset	TWO
You belong here	ONE

Smell the sea	FIVE
Feel the sky	SIX
Let your soul and spirit fly	TWO
You belong here	ONE
How much do I love thee	THREE
Let me count the waves	FIVE
You belong here	ONE
Transform your spirit	TWO
Feed your soul	FIVE
Be unapologetically you	THREE
You belong here	ONE
Happiness	THREE
Is a day in Tulum	FOUR
You belong Here	ONE

LIGHTS.

ONE addresses the audience.

ONE

I have a memory of this place. It was different then.

I close my eyes, imagine the feeling of my grandmother's hands in mine. Her skin is soft, wrinkled—aged by time, sacrifice, and love.

She wants to share this place with me.

I feel the coolness of the breeze on the back of my neck—a welcome kiss in the thick, humid Yucatán air. It might rain at any moment, as it sometimes does in the tropics.

In early 1990s Tulum, the jungle gives way to a sleepy beach town. The main attraction here are the ruins, standing tall above the shoreline, with just a little bit of rocky beach and sharp reefs below.

The Mayans called this Zamá, or “Place of the Dawning Sun.”

It shines proudly above us and the clear blue water glistens back in supplication.

This is not a beach where you lay down to tan, but one that brings you to your knees.

You cannot fathom how beautiful it is.

I remember the sound of my brother's high-pitched scream as we run and chase one another on the beach below the ruins.

This place is magical. Like God put a piece of heaven on earth, just for us.

Our little secret.

My grandfather shows me El Castillo. The Mayans used this pyramid as a sort of ancient lighthouse. A guide for travelers, like us.

My grandfather waves his hand across the ruins as he tells me, “This is where you come from.”

Can you imagine the enormity of that for a seven year old?

These ruins—this place—is my legacy.

I look around now and it appears, our secret, is out.

Cars and congestion everywhere—two lanes of traffic up and down the single road that runs through what they now call “Zona Hotelera”.

Beach clubs, luxury hotels, shops, bars, and five-star gastronomy restaurants.

Artificial lights replace the brightness of the full moon.

Car horns keep perfect time with the endless thump of house music that filters out into the streets.

The ultimate party will go on all night.

Zona Hotelera—a neighborhood unto its own.

Is *this* my legacy?

What would my ancestors say?

I have a memory of this place. It was different then.

ONE exits.

LIGHTS.

TWO assumes the role of Yoga Instructor.

TWO

This is the first day of the rest of your life.  
Breathe in.

The Company does.

TWO

And release it out.

The Company does.

TWO

With love, mindfulness, and gratitude, we come to a place of stillness to recenter and refocus our lives.  
Honor the stillness.  
Let it be your guide.  
Ask yourself, why are you here?  
*Who* do you want to be?  
*Where* do you want this journey to take you?  
Cross the threshold and breathe new life into...  
(searches for an inspirational phrase)  
...Your life.

They all breathe in and out.

TWO exits. THREE stands, assumes the role of Hotel Receptionist, working away at her computer. FOUR, FIVE, and SIX become Guests, checking in. FOUR enters.

THREE

Hello! Welcome to *breathe • tulum*, where you can be unapologetically you.  
Will you be staying with us?

FOUR

(bad Spanish)

Hola! Tengo reservaciones—

THREE

Oh, you don't have to—

FOUR

Mi nombre es Valerie.

THREE

I speak English.

FOUR

Oh, no—necesito practico para estar muy bueno a Español.

THREE

I can see that.

FIVE, day drunk with a bridal headband/sash, and SIX,  
recording to Instagram Live on her iPhone, enter.

SIX

What up, pretty babies! I am coming to you live from Tulum, Mexico where me and my best gal pals are about to get our party on for Liv's bachelorette!

FIVE

I'm getting married!

FIVE hiccups, flashes her ring at the camera.

SIX

(noticing the hotel lobby, continues filming)

This is so sick! Can you believe this place?

We got palm trees, monstera plants....

Ohhhh look at this cute little reception area!

FIVE

(to FOUR)

Vallllllll.... Where's our room, Val?

FOUR

(to FIVE)

I'm trying to check in—

(to THREE, apologetic)

She had a few drinks on the plane.

FIVE

Just some mimosas, but I'm goooooood 'cause we're in MEXICO, BITCHES!

(FOUR, FIVE, SIX)

WHOOOOO!

(to THREE)

I'm getting married, you know.

FIVE flashes her ring at THREE.

THREE

That's wonderful. Congratulations.

FIVE

(to FOUR, pleasantly surprised)h

She speaks English!

THREE

Yes, our entire staff speaks English.

SIX

Good on you! I took Español in high school and I can't remember a thing except burrito, Dorito—

THREE

Dorito is not a word, but I found your reservation.

You'll be in the Jungle Suite, which overlooks the ocean.

There are four pools on the property, all of which can be accessed 24/7, as well as the private plunge pool in front of your room.

Our award-winning mixology cocktail bar is behind me to my left—

FIVE

Ooooh, let's get champers!

THREE

All three of our restaurants are located throughout the property. Let me know if I can make you a reservation for our world-famous Nest Dining Experience.

SIX

What's that?

THREE

It's when you sit in what looks like a birds nest overlooking the Mayan jungle and eat your dinner. Very popular.

(beat)

Now, here is your key and some complementary lavender oil—to ground yourself and help you breathe easy.

FIVE

You have wifi, right?

SIX

Oh, yeah. I'm expecting a work email.

FOUR

Me, too.

They all take out their phones, start scrolling.

THREE

Of course—though we encourage all guests to turn off their devices during their stay so that they can better commune with nature.

SIX

Oh, I know, I know—I'm not *working* working.

FOUR

I just want to make myself available.

FIVE

Just in case.

SIX

After all, this is vacation.

FOUR

“breathe-tulum-guest” — is that you?

THREE

Yes, but—

FIVE

And the password is...?

THREE

“be present.” All lowercase.

They all type the password into their phones.

SIX

Perfect.



FIVE  
I'm in.

FOUR  
Me, too.

They all get lost in their phones for a few beats, checking email, texts. When she's done, FOUR rejoins reality.

FOUR  
(off THREE)  
Well, gracias por todo tu ayuda!

THREE  
You're welcome.

SIX  
Ooooooh, let's get a selfie!

FOUR, FIVE, and SIX get together for a selfie in front of the reception desk. They catch THREE in the picture, who is caught off guard. After they snap, their picture they bounce off.

THREE is left alone. She breathes.

LIGHTS.

The Company enters, takes seats at an open-air restaurant.

ONE  
Roasted wild mushrooms over beetroot purée, served on a bed of lemongrass and mint.

TWO  
Candied mussels in chile paste (not spicy), creamy avocado, and fresh sprouts from our greenhouse. Smoked with medicinal plants—chamomile, hibiscus, and sage.

THREE  
Our reinterpretation of a classic Aguachile, emulsified with pumpkin seed (a regional touch!) and a lime mayonnaise dressing, served with crunchy corn.

FOUR  
Warm papaya empanadas, hot off the grill, swimming in a ducle de leche river.

FIVE

Wild-caught Marlin with avocado, pickled onions, jicama, and holy basil, bathing in a ginger-mezcal agua, topped with radish sprouts.

SIX

Suckling pig, avocado oil, chargrilled banana and tomatillos, massaged in a red recado and topped with microgreens.

FIVE appears, assuming the role of Chef. She's being interviewed.

FIVE

Six years ago, we decided to take the leap.  
My girlfriend and I were at the top of our game, conquering New York's restaurant scene.

FOUR appears, assuming the role of Girlfriend/Chef, joins interview.

FOUR

Hi!

FIVE

I worked in the kitchens at Freemans and Prune—

FOUR

And I worked at Gramercy Tavern and Le Bernadin.

FIVE

We were on fire. Unstoppable.

FOUR

But we also were growing weary of our life in The City.  
Always working, always rushing.

FIVE

Never enough time, never enough money.

FOUR

But then we booked a week-long vacation over the holidays in Tulum and we fell in love.

FIVE

The jungle breeze, the salty sea air—

FOUR

The acrid, smoky scent of chilis roasting on an open fire mixed with woody, sweet gardenias as you walk the streets.

FIVE

It was paradise.

FOUR

Just paradise.

ONE looks up from her table, watches the interview.

ONE

(concerned)

Heaven on earth. Our little secret.

FOUR

Life is slower here. Everyone in Tulum seems happier, they're always smiling.

FIVE

They kick back with a tequila or beer and RELAAAAAX.  
How bad can your problems be when the ocean is right outside your door?

FOUR

Near the end of our vacation, we found ourselves wondering, "What if?"  
*What if* we just let go of everything we knew—

FIVE

Our fancy restaurant jobs, our friends, the last rent-stabilized apartment in New York—

FOUR

—and moved here to start our own restaurant?

TWO

Sea urchin ceviche, mandarin aguachile, red cabbage kimchi, and cucumber.

SIX

Grilled deer ribs with tamarind sauce and yucca flautas.

THREE

Scallop crudo, coconut salsa verde, pickled onion flowers, topped with scallop chicharrón.

FOUR

I admit, we had no idea what we were doing, but we did it anyway!

FIVE

Grab the life you want, don't wait!

FOUR

Do whatever it takes.

FIVE

It's that adventures spirit that got us through New York, and I knew it could get us through Tulum's emerging market. So, we packed up and moved to Mexico!

FOUR

We had some money saved and thank goodness for good credit scores!  
But there were also challenges—

FIVE

The language barrier, getting the permits to build on government regulated land, finding local fisherman and produce markets to help us create a delicious, seasonal menu with whatever was freshest and available that day.

FOUR

It was the most humbling experience of our lives.

FIVE

We also have a killer cocktail menu. We have over twenty kinds of Mezcal.

ONE/TWO/THREE/SIX

(raising their glasses)

Salud!

FOUR

Despite every hard moment we faced, we did it.  
Six years later, we have the most sought after restaurant in town.

FIVE

Tourists *and* locals will stand in line for hours just for a chance to get in.

FOUR

We're so busy every night—it's a real blessing.

FIVE

I don't like to brag, but people say it's one of the best meals they've ever had in their lives.

FOUR

In recent years, more hotels and restaurants have jumped in on the fine dining trend here in Tulum, but I am proud to say...we were here first.

FOUR and FIVE smile at one another.

LIGHTS.

ONE addresses the audience.

ONE

Let's play a game.  
It's an easy one. Word association, my favorite.  
It makes the time go by faster.  
Now, when I say "Tulum", what do you think?

ONE should really ask the audience here. Ad-libs welcome. Let's get the responses from at least three people, and ONE should repeat back whatever she hears for the entire audience.

ONE

You want to know what I think of?  
(wait for audience's "yes" response)  
When I think "Tulum", I think of the word "blue".  
Calming sea baths in the ocean.  
Sandcastles.  
Charred octopus, right off the grill.  
Cocteles with a side of saltines.  
The ding of a bicycle bell from a pedicab as it rolls on by.  
The sound of my grandfather ordering the fish of the day from a seaside restaurant and immediately seeing someone go get it from the ocean in a tiny boat.  
Coronas and Coke-a-Cola in glass bottles.  
The shocking sting from a squeeze of lime underneath my tongue.  
The familiar call of the candyman as he carries a wooden tray with sweets on his head:  
"Merengue! Merengue! Dulces y merengues!"  
The sound of my grandmother's voice as she rocks me to sleep in a hammock, and the imprint it leaves on my skin when I wake up.  
I think of how much I love the feeling of the sand between my toes—hot and rough and so comforting that I dig myself in deeper and deeper, so that nothing and no one can remove me from this place.

LIGHTS.

THREE and SIX become Hotel Workers. Armed with pitchforks, rubber gloves, and trash bags, they begin clearing large strands of sargassum algae off the beach.

SIX

(to audience)

Sorry about the smell. When the seaweed piles up like this, it starts to decay.

THREE

Hydrogen sulfide. It's like a never-ending version of the worst fart you've ever smelled.

SIX

We have to do this every morning before the beach club opens.

We sweep it away and overnight—

THREE

More heaps appear.

Like clockwork.

SIX

Can't miss a day.

Got to clear it away.

THREE

Before you wake up

SIX

So you can brunch

THREE

So you can run

SIX

So you can swim

THREE

Do yoga

SIX

Or tan

THREE

So you can day drink

SIX

So you can party under the stars

THREE

(to SIX)

I wonder if this will ever get better.

SIX

I hear it's only going to get worse.

Pretty soon, the algae bloom will be something you can predict. We'll have "hurricane season" and "sargassum season."

THREE

(off smell)

Phughhhh.

SIX

Phughhhh. Gives me a headache.

THREE

Makes my stomach turn.

SIX

Too much of this stuff will kill ya, just ask the coral—

THREE

And the fish—

SIX

And the sea grass—

THREE

Sea turtles can't lay their eggs.

SIX lifts up a huge pile of seaweed.

THREE

How to make an ecological disaster in just three easy steps:

1) Take the ocean, turn the heat on high

SIX

2) Add a mixture of river run off, agricultural fertilizers, and sewage from a tourist town's overburdened septic system

THREE

3) Blend until smooth and release into the wild

SIX

Now you have the perfect conditions for algae bloom

THREE

Without you, our industry dies.

SIX

With you, the algae thrives.

THREE

So what are we to do?

They look straight at the audience, wait a few beats for a response.

THREE

It's OK. You can take a picture.  
Is this what you wanted to see?

LIGHTS.

The sound of a Tibetan Singing Bowl ringing.  
TWO becomes the Yoga Instructor. The Company resumes their places in class.

TWO

Close your eyes.  
Find your center.  
Really send those vibrations into the ground.  
Stake your claim on your life.  
You are in control here.  
You are the master of your own desires.  
No place to rush off to. Just be.  
We are so lucky to be in this place, surrounded by the beauty and the healing serenity of nature.  
We are merely fragments of light that shine with love and the magic of the sun.  
Go deep within.  
What is it that you really want?  
Freedom? Forgiveness? Abundance?  
All you have to do is listen.  
You choose where to light your hearth.  
We sit here, humbled and still, calling upon nature's divine energies: the sun, the moon, the wind, and water, to join us and guide us on our journey of transformation.  
We are all connected.  
Breathe in.

The Company does.



And release it out.  
Once more.

TWO

The Company breathes in, and out.

This is a beautiful place.  
(to ONE)  
I hope you find what you're searching for.

TWO

LIGHTS.

The Company addresses the audience.

This secret was never mine to keep

ONE

Join the Tribe

TWO

But it felt like it was

ONE

Seek your light

THREE

Become one with the universe

TWO

Happiness is a day in Tulum

FOUR

Who belongs here?

ONE

Summon your spirit

TWO

Free your senses

FIVE

The coral, the breeze, the dusty roads

ONE

Love without fear	SIX
The iguana that sunbathes on ancient stones	ONE
Dance like no one is watching	TWO
The chatter and bustle of the open-air market	ONE
Express yourself	THREE
The old women who make tortillas on the side of the road	ONE
Let your colors shine	FIVE
Cherish every moment	TWO
Do I belong here?	ONE
Be genuine, be spontaneous	SIX
Be unapologetically you	THREE
You belong here (reassuring herself)	ONE
Happiness	THREE
Is a day in Tulum	FOUR

You belong  
Here?

ONE

END OF PLAY.