

The Dreamer's Due

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This is the story of a world where every step towards success has a tax that must be paid. Those who dare to dream big and hustle relentlessly to turn their goals into reality are no stranger to this burden. I first felt the weight of the “Dreamer’s Due” as a teenager. It wasn’t levied in currency but in fragments of life—those things that make living delightful and whole.

From the outset, one can’t help but wonder: is the price we pay for our dreams worth the ultimate outcome? This question haunted me, even as I took my first steps towards my ambitions.

The initial tax came unexpectedly, even before I truly began my journey. My first undergraduate semester with an esteemed university was attended remotely while the world was shut down. I adapted to a nocturnal life on the other side of the globe as classes then ran from midnight to sunrise. Despite the toll on my body and mind, I earned perfect grades that semester. The cost, however, was my sleep, disrupted and taxed by my new schedule. Diagnosed with intermittent insomnia, I paid heavily for my dedication. Was losing sleep a price too high? At times I thought yes, but the promise of my dreams proved stronger than my doubt.

The next significant payment was leaving my homeland. This departure was the highest bracket of the levy, paid all at once. Leaving behind friends, loved ones, family, the rich tapestry of

culture, festivals, and the familiar flavors of home was the only way to pursue an education in a field that was not offered back home. In the narrative of my life, moving so far away was a necessary tax for the chance to chase the stars. Sometimes, I would wonder if the richness of home could have offered a different kind of success—one less costly but perhaps equally fulfilling. While I can’t navigate the roads not taken, I can say that I chose the one I am on for a reason, regardless of the tolls it has charged.

Settling into a new life in a new place, I met a friend. I found solace in my friendship with him. He, too, was paying his cess to the Dreamer’s Due. We’d meet, sharing updates on our lives and the latest “taxes” we’d paid—whether it was sleep, social life, or sanity. Our discussions were filled with achievements and losses, but we always reassured each other that our sacrifices were worth it.

As my journey progressed, the tax collector grew more insistent. My hobbies and little joys were next. The cricket bat that had seen countless sunsets was now tucked away, gathering dust as equations and formulae took over my free time. Video games, once my refuge from the rigors of academia, transformed into mere relics of a life I could barely remember. My former hobbies, which had painted my days with joy and relaxation, were surrendered at the altar of my ambition. Each sacrifice was logged in this ledger of hustle, each entry a bittersweet step toward my dream. Sometimes, I would sigh, wondering if losing

these pieces of myself was truly necessary.

In the new environment, however, I discovered unexpected joys that could help fill the void left by my relinquished hobbies. The surrounding rugged landscapes invited me to explore hiking and rock climbing. Scaling rocky faces and reaching new summits brought a thrill that momentarily made the sacrifices seem worthwhile. These activities connected me deeply with nature, offering a fresh perspective on the universe I was so fervently studying. This, I felt, was a tax well paid.

Yet, as graduate school beckoned and I prepared to move again, these newfound passions were also claimed by the Dreamer's Due. The tax collector snatched these moments of joy, adding them to the growing tally of my dues. Once again, I found myself giving up cherished activities, the cost of my relentless pursuit of knowledge growing ever steeper. Each time I questioned, 'Is it still worth it?' I wasn't always sure of the answer.

During this period of transition, the realization of these accumulated losses became overwhelming. One day, as my friend and I met, reflecting on what more could possibly be taken from us, we found ourselves at a loss. That profound and unsettling conversation would soon become one of our last.

Our paths diverged in our individual pursuits of graduate school, sending us to opposite corners of the globe. Suddenly, the joy of our companionship, which had become a cornerstone of my emotional support, was ruthlessly taxed away. Left in the wake of our parting, we were deeply haunted by the question we had always dismissed. Was all this actually worth it?

As I navigate my path towards the future that I have strived for, achieving yet sacrificing, I often reflect on that question. The tax never stops; it grows with every ambition. The costs of this journey are clear and I continue to pay the Dreamer's Due, always wondering if the final tally will justify the price of my dreams.

Sometimes, I ponder the roads not taken. What if I had stayed in my homeland, surrendering to expectations but surrounded by the warmth of familiar faces and customs? Could I have found a different path to success, one that did not demand such steep payments? What if I had managed to hold onto my old hobbies and relationships more tightly—would the sense of loss still feel so devastating, or would the tax have been less severe? These questions linger, unanswered, as I pay my dues, step by uncertain step.